

# LITERACY Today

No. 96

ISSN: 1367-8825

July 2021

## The Government publishes its Reading Framework

**E**arlier this month the Government published *The Reading Framework, Teaching the foundations of literacy*, a policy paper that contained what the Government called “guidance” for schools to meet existing expectations for teaching early reading. The “guidance” is linked to Ofsted’s inspection framework, so it is guidance as long as you follow it. It is aimed at teachers, school leaders, reading and literacy leads, governing bodies and ITT providers.

The *Reading Framework*:

- Focuses on the early stages of teaching reading and the contribution of talk, stories and the Government’s controversial systematic synthetic phonics (SSP).
- Supports primary school leaders to evaluate their teaching of early reading and best practice for improving early reading, especially in Reception and Year 1, and older pupils who have not yet mastered the foundations of reading.
- Helps schools to meet existing expectations for teaching early reading, as set out in:
  - The national curriculum programmes of study.
  - The statutory framework for the early years foundation stage.
  - Ofsted’s education inspection framework.

The Government claimed that this document has been developed through the contributions of experts from across the literacy sector and school leaders. It is based on the “valued experience and knowledge” of teachers, reading and language experts, educational organisations, English Hubs council members, and the 34 English Hubs. However, those who question the effectiveness of policy, in particular synthetic phonics as the only way to teach reading, have been ignored.

Synthetic phonics has proved big and highly profitable business for some of those who have developed synthetic phonics programmes. The departmental press release accompanying *The Reading Framework* includes a nudge for schools to purchase a phonics programme. It states: “Schools considering purchasing a new SSP programme can find more information at choosing a phonics programme” which then links to a page on the GOV.UK website which lists commercial products.

The press release reminds schools that the Government has made £5 million of additional funding available for the purchase of these SSP programmes.

- See the critique on page 8 and the document review on pages 10 and 11.

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## Library investment key to helping children catch up following pandemic

**Investing in libraries will be key to driving the national recovery from COVID-19 and enabling children to catch up on lost learning, according to the Local Government Association. The LGA pointed out that providing telephone support to families receiving laptops for home schooling, virtual library services and online reading groups had been some of the work that libraries had been undertaking.**

The LGA added that many libraries were also supporting plans for an enhanced Summer Reading Challenge which would include a range of free online activities, games and videos to supplement children's reading skills.

Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson, chairman of the LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport Board, said libraries had worked hard to adapt to new ways of providing services throughout the past year and they remained one of the few free cultural and educational services available in every part of the country. He added that they would also be crucial to ambitions for addressing imbalances between towns and cities.

## Independent book shops

**Independent Book Shop Week was celebrated between 19 and 26 June. This year marked the 15th anniversary of the event, designed to promote and sustain independent book shops. This year's event aims to celebrate the resilience and creativity demonstrated by indie booksellers over the past year, in the face of the pandemic.**

Building on the success of 2020, the "indie twinning" strand of the initiative returned for a second year, with indie publishers and bookshops teaming up to develop bespoke programmes of activity across the country. These included Atlantic Books with multi-award winning bookshop Book-ish in Crickhowell, which presented themed exclusive content through Independent Bookshop Week, including a subscription box, interactive online author events and giveaways.

Meanwhile, Usborne Publishing teamed up with Rocketship Books in Salisbury, with efforts that included: a "Find the Duck" trail from Sam Taplin and Simon Taylor-Kielty's bestselling Poppy and Sam series around Salisbury, leading back to the bookshop. Comma Press joining forces with the Lighthouse Bookshop in Edinburgh, to launch the anthology *The American Way*.

***"This year's event aims to celebrate the resilience and creativity demonstrated by indie booksellers over the past year, in the face of the pandemic."***

Emma Bradshaw, head of campaigns at the Booksellers Association, told the trade paper *The Bookseller*: "It's been a joy to see customers going back into their local bookshops as COVID restrictions started to ease ... We're excited to continue the celebrations into Independent Bookshop Week, marking its 15th anniversary this year. Over the past year, there's been a refreshed appreciation for independent booksellers and the place they hold at the heart of their high streets and communities. With virtual as well as in-person celebrations taking place across the UK and Ireland, we hope everyone will join us in supporting independent bookshops, and in celebrating their resilience, creativity and indefatigable commitment."

The event was supported in Parliament, with two early day motions tabled. The motions, tabled by Liberal Democrats Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) and Sarah Olney (Richmond Park) extolled the virtues and advantages of independent book shops and highlighted the danger to them of vast on-line book sellers.

# Phonic checks back in Autumn

Last month the Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, confirmed that phonic checks for children in year 2 at primary school would be going ahead in the Autumn term, after they were abandoned last year because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite some opposition within the primary sector, the Government has brought the tests back this year rather than next.

The check of 40 words, 20 real and 20 pseudo words, has each year since 2012 been administered in June to Year 1 children aged around 6 years of age. From 2013 to 2019 any children who failed to achieve the standard expected, a pass mark of 32, were required to re-sit the check in year 2. Over the same period synthetic phonics has been the method required by the Government for teaching all children to read.

Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union, said that the last thing that children needed after COVID-19 was another test which would not tell teachers anything new or helpful about their pupils, but would simply put them under more pressure.

He pointed out that, children who failed the test, would be required to re-sit in the summer term, which was not the right message for pupils who had just experienced huge disruption to their education due to the pandemic. Mr Courtney added that carrying out the test in autumn would also place an unnecessary burden on school staff at a time when they would be wanting to focus all their energies on supporting pupils with learning.

- See The Phonics Screening Check 2012-2022: tracking and tracing changes in government policy, by Margaret M Clark, in the research section on page 18.

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## Fifth year of Opportunity Areas announced

The Government has announced that more young people in some of the most disadvantaged regions of England will benefit from a fifth year of investment in the flagship Opportunity Areas programme as part of the commitment to levelling up. The Opportunity Areas Minister, Michelle Donelan, whose main job is as Minister of State for Universities, said that since 2016, the programme had invested £90 million to improve school standards, attendance, teaching quality and recruitment, careers training and advice, literacy and maths skills, alongside tackling barriers to learning that existed beyond the school gates.

An additional £18 million would be invested in 12 Opportunity Areas, including Blackpool, Derby and Oldham. The minister explained that each area would be “twinned” with previous areas that had faced similar challenges so that they could benefit from their expertise and collaborate more closely on the issues facing children and young people.

Miss Donelan pointed out that the programme would aim to help children and young people improve in key subjects such as maths and English, support pupils who were at risk of falling out of education or give older students the confidence and skills to make the leap from school to work.

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# 2022 non-exam assessment and fieldwork requirements consultation

**O**fqual has published a consultation on arrangements for non-exam assessment (NEA) in certain subjects and fieldwork requirements for students entering GCSE, AS and A-level qualifications in 2022. Last year, following a public consultation, Ofqual had changed the non-exam assessment and fieldwork requirements for some GCSEs, AS and A-levels to address obstacles caused by the pandemic.

The changes had been for students who were due to be awarded qualifications in the current academic year only. Ofqual is now seeking views on the extent to which the arrangements for certain subjects should be carried forward for students who are due to sit exams in summer 2022. This consultation will focus on the subjects for which preparation and work for non-exam assessment and fieldwork activities will be taking place this term for students who will be taking their exams in 2022. It will cover:

- Non-exam assessments in dance, design and technology, drama (and theatre), film studies, food preparation and nutrition, media studies, music, music technology, and physical education.
- Fieldwork activities in geography, geology and environmental science.
- Assessment of speaking skills in GCSE modern foreign language qualifications
- Assessment of spoken language in GCSE English language.

Ofqual is seeking views on its proposal for the flexibilities and adaptations that had been introduced in the subjects, to be largely carried forward to the next academic year. The consultation will specifically focus on subjects where preparation and work for non-exam assessment and fieldwork activities would be taking place this term for students who would be taking their exams in 2022.

However, Ofqual stressed that it recognised that there were other activities about which students, teachers and exam boards might have questions. Ofqual said that the hope was, that following further lifting of public health restrictions, it would be possible for students to complete work in other subjects as usual during the next academic year.

Ofqual pointed out that in GCSE ancient history, history and English literature, the Government had agreed that, for 2021 only, students would be assessed on less content than usual, and the arrangements in the subjects will be considered as part of the wider policy decisions for the 2022 exams. Ofqual has recently confirmed that there would be an autumn exam series in 2021. Except for art and design qualifications, grades will be determined by students' performance in the exams only, there will be no non-exam assessments.

The exams will be in their normal format, and while there will be no advanced notice or exam aids, students will be assessed on the same content as had been planned for exams in summer 2021. Therefore, in GCSE English literature, history and ancient history, for example, students will answer questions on a reduced number of topics. In GCSE and AS geography students will not have to answer questions in the exam about their own fieldwork experience, and GCSE MFL students will have a speaking endorsement rather than a speaking test.

Anyone wishing to respond to Ofqual's consultation on 2022 non-exam assessment and fieldwork requirements can fill out a short survey accessible from the consultation page, which is open until 11:45 pm on Friday 28 May. Ofqual pointed out that for vocational and technical qualifications, and other general qualifications, in relation to internal assessment, adaptations will continue to be in place for social distancing. Ofqual added that, while it expected that assessment in the coming year would largely reflect a return to normality, other types of adaptation to respond to the impacts of the pandemic were under consideration, and more information would follow soon.



# Every school with Reception class offered early language training

**E**very state school with a Reception class in England can apply for training and resources through an early years' catch-up programme funded by the Government, to support pupils with vital communication skills. Delivered by the Nuffield Foundation and funded by £8 million of investment, recruitment has begun for the second wave of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI), a programme to raise outcomes in Reception-age children's early language, communication and speech skills, particularly those who needed the most support to overcome the disruption of the pandemic.

The Children and Families Minister, Vicky Ford, said that the early results from Nuffield had been very encouraging and she urged schools with a Reception class to sign up in the second phase. She pointed out that the £8 million expansion had been announced by the Prime Minister in February as part of the new £700 million package to tackle lost learning, following the original £9 million investment as part of the National Tutoring Programme in June 2020.

The expansion for the 2021-22 schools year will be managed and delivered by the Nuffield Foundation on the Government's behalf, supported by the University of Oxford and Oxford University Press. Developed by researchers at the Universities of Oxford, Sheffield and York, NELI helps young pupils identified as needing targeted language support, by offering individual and small-group language teaching sessions to between three and six pupils, run by a trained teaching assistant or early years professional. Findings from the most recent trial of NELI funded by the Education Endowment Foundation had found that children receiving the intervention had made an extra three months additional progress in their oral language skills compared to children who had not.

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## Changes due to the extension of legacy English and mathematics Functional Skills qualifications

**O**fqual has updated the following conditions, requirements and guidance for English and mathematics Functional Skills qualifications documents: Functional Skills English conditions and requirements; Functional Skills English guidance; Functional Skills mathematics conditions and requirements and; Functional Skills mathematics guidance.

The changes follow the Secretary of State's decision to extend the end date for continuing learners on the legacy Functional Skills qualifications until 31 July 2021. Ofqual pointed out that in December 2020, it had consulted with awarding organisations offering the legacy qualifications on the proposed minor changes to the conditions and guidance.

Ofqual said that as it had not received any objections to its proposals, it had implemented the changes to its conditions to extend the regulation end dates for the legacy qualifications. Ofqual added that it had written to awarding organisations that offered the legacy qualifications separately to inform them of the decisions.

***“The changes follow the Secretary of State’s decision to extend the end date for continuing learners on the legacy Functional Skills qualifications until 31 July 2021. Ofqual pointed out that in December 2020, it had consulted with awarding organisations offering the legacy qualifications on the proposed minor changes to the conditions and guidance.”***

# 62,000 reception-age pupils in England to take part in early language programme

**T**wo-fifths of primary schools in England have signed up to take part in a programme to support four- and five-year-olds whose early language and literacy development had been most affected by the pandemic. 62,000 reception-age pupils in 6,672 schools will receive the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) this school year, according to data released by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

NELI, regarded as the most well-evidenced early years language programme available to schools in England, was offered to state-funded schools with Reception pupils at no cost by the Department for Education, in response to disruption to schooling caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The EEF is managing the scale-up, which had been funded under the DfE's wider COVID-recovery efforts. The DfE has announced additional funding to expand the rollout to more schools for the 2021/22 school year, to be delivered by the Nuffield Foundation.

Developed by researchers at the Universities of Oxford, Sheffield and York, NELI involves scripted individual and small-group language teaching sessions delivered by a trained teaching assistant or early years educator to children identified as being in need of targeted language support. So far, almost 20,000 teaching assistants and teachers have received online training designed by the University of Oxford and provided via FutureLearn.com, the leading social learning platform, to deliver the NELI programme to pupils.

The NELI programme, published by Oxford University Press, has been tested through several trials, including two funded by the EEF. The most recent, involving 193 schools, had found that children who had received NELI had made, on average, +3 months of additional progress in oral language skills compared to children who had not received NELI.

New emerging findings from an ongoing EEF-funded study, which aims to examine the impact of COVID-19 disruption on primary school starters, suggest that language and communication are particular areas of concern for teachers this year.

Delivery of the 20-week NELI intervention had been planned to begin in January, however it had had to be delayed until schools had re-opened fully after the second period of partial closures. Schools are being encouraged to extend delivery into the next academic year (when pupils progress into Year 1) to complete the full programme.

Professor Becky Francis, CEO of the Education Endowment Foundation, said that the impressive reach that the Nuffield Early Language Intervention had achieved in its first year of delivery had showed how teaching professionals were embracing evidence-informed approaches to maximise their pupils' progress. Josh Hillman, Director of Education at the Nuffield Foundation, encouraged all schools who had not yet done so, to apply to receive NELI, which would help them to address the communication and language development needs of children starting school later this year. He explained that specialist training for teaching assistants to deliver NELI was free and it could be accessed online, to enable schools to provide targeted intervention for children who were most in need of additional support in their oral language development.

***“Developed by researchers at the Universities of Oxford, Sheffield and York, NELI involves scripted individual and small-group language teaching sessions delivered by a trained teaching assistant or early years educator to children identified as being in need of targeted language support. So far, almost 20,000 teaching assistants and teachers have received online training designed by the University of Oxford and provided via FutureLearn.com...”***

# The Reading Framework

By Sue Reid

Until last December at Newman University and now doing independent research and consultancy

**O**n Saturday 10 July, just over a week before the end of term the Government published a reading framework. The framework focuses on the early stages of reading and although badged as guidance presents a prescriptive agenda which is aimed at a wide readership from Initial Teacher Training (ITT) partnerships and students to primary school teachers and leaders. The alignment with Ofsted's Education Inspection Frameworks (p.6) makes the framework less guidance and more a rigid structure related to Ofsted judgements with audits included to ensure that schools are keeping to the guidance. This is likely to further erode teachers' professional judgement as they seek to adhere to the expectation of Ofsted rather than to the needs of the children they are teaching and will exclude debate about alternative methods of teaching reading in ITT institutions (Clark et al 2020)

The framework, although providing some good practice for ITT students and Early Career Teachers (ECT), takes a simplistic attitude towards the complex skill of reading with phonics the only approach sanctioned to teach reading. The Simple View of Reading (SVR) is still the model promoted in spite of the fact that Tunmer, one of its original authors, states that reading is more multi-faceted than the original SVR model.

The importance of phonics in the teaching of reading is not in dispute here but evidence to support this has been cherry picked. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) cited as an example of support for phonics, actually states that an approach should include both phonics and the teaching of comprehension (2020 p8). However, this framework states that comprehension should not be taught until children are fluent readers which is defined as having speed and accuracy but ignores prosody, an essential link to comprehension.

It is good to see the importance of talk and stories and the need to develop children's vocabulary. However, this is undermined by the weeding out of non-decodable books from the book corner and children being taught phonics for an hour a day by the end of reception rather than being immersed in the richness of the English language.

Much of the evidence cited in the framework is dated and any evidence that is contrary to the government stance is ignored Clark (2014, 2020). There are also unsubstantiated statements and a reiteration of the effect of the phonics check, with data which supports the rise in the number of children who have reached the expected standard in phonics but none to support an improvement in reading levels at the end of Key Stage 2. Although children who need to catch up are catered for (with more phonics), there is no mention of those children who come to school already able to read with meaning. Do they too

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***(Continued on page 9.)***



*(Continued from page 8.)*

have to learn the alphabetic code to ensure they reach the expected standard in the phonics screening check?

As a framework for reading this guide is trying to reach too many disparate groups and although useful for ITT students, experienced teachers could see it as patronising and senior leaders could see it is a guide to a successful Ofsted. This prescriptive and regulative framework reduces both learner agency and professional judgment (Ellis and Moss 2014). Leading perhaps towards further commercialisation of the reading curriculum.

### **Foot notes**

Clark Margaret M. (2014) *Synthetic Phonics and Literacy Learning: An evidence-based critique*. Birmingham: Glendale Education.

Clark Margaret M. et al (2020). *Independent research into the impact of the systematic synthetic phonics government policy on literacy policy on literacy courses at institutions in England delivering Initial Teacher Education*. This can be read and downloaded from Newman University website.

<https://www.newman.ac.uk/knowledge-base/independent-research-into-the-impact-of-the-systematic-synthetic-phonics-government-policy-on-literacy-courses-at-institutions-delivering-initial-teacher-education-in-england>.

Clark Margaret M. (2020) *Education Journal Review* Vol 26 No 3.

Education Endowment Foundation (2020) *Improving Literacy in Key Stage 1: Guidance Report*: London

Ellis, S. and Moss, G (2014) 'Ethics, education policy and research: the phonics question reconsidered' *British Educational Research Journal*, 40 (2): 241-60

# The Reading Framework

*The Reading Framework: Teaching the foundations of literacy*, Department for Education, published on Saturday 10 July 2021.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-reading-framework-teaching-the-foundations-of-literacy>

**T**he *Reading Framework: Teaching the foundations of literacy* is guidance from the Department for Education for primary schools, initial teacher training (ITT) partnerships, specialist provision and others in England. It focuses on the early stages of teaching reading. Its key objective is to help schools meet their expectations around early reading as set out in the national curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework. It also aligns with Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework.

The guidance aims to:

- Set out some of the research underpinning the importance of talk, stories and systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) in the teaching of reading.
- Provide practical support for high-quality teaching, including assessment and the importance of 'fidelity to the programme'.
- Support schools to evaluate their teaching of early reading, especially in Reception and year 1, and identify how to improve provision if weaknesses are found.
- Explain the importance of systematic phonics teaching for older pupils who are at risk of failing to learn to read because they cannot decode well enough.
- Support schools working with parents to help their children learn to read.

Key points are listed at the end of each section to support leaders and teachers audit their current practice. The DfE claims that the document is based on teachers' experiences, classroom observations, assessments and research, as well as advice from and the contributions of experts from the early literacy sector. It also reflects the experiences of many primary schools that excel in the teaching of reading, including those in the English Hubs programme, which is administered by the Department for Education. The references to research provide schools, ITT trainees, and those who teach them, with sources for further reading.

## Why reading matters

The guidance begins by setting out the social, cultural and economic importance of reading before outlining a conceptual model of it. The national curriculum programmes of study for reading are based on this model, which consists of two dimensions: language comprehension and word reading.

## Language comprehension

The guidance discusses the importance of talk and stories, and the critical links between these, especially the role stories play in developing young children's vocabulary and language. It explains how teachers might expand children's store of words through talk throughout the day, within the curriculum and, in particular, through stories. Listening to and talking about stories and non-fiction develops children's vocabulary, because they meet words they would rarely hear or use in everyday speech. Understanding vocabulary is vital for comprehension and so also for wider learning and progress. The guidance also considers the role of poetry, rhymes and songs in attuning children to the sounds of language.

## Teaching word reading and spelling

The national curriculum is designed to make sure that all children are able to read and write fluently by the time they leave year 6, so that they can make progress at secondary school. The Government believes that a

*(Continued on page 11.)*

*(Continued from page 10.)*

vital element of this is the early and successful teaching of phonics. The use of synthetic phonics as the only way to teach language is controversial, as there is evidence which suggests it is not, but this guidance follows the Government line on the use of phonics.

The Government and this guidance believe that understanding that the letters on the page represent the sounds in spoken words underpins successful word reading. Children's knowledge of the English alphabetic code – how letters or groups of letters represent the sounds of the language – supports their reading and spelling.

This guidance explains why teachers themselves also need to understand the alphabetic code: the guidance claims that evidence supports the key role of phonic knowledge and skills in early reading and spelling.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) is the government-designated What Works Centre for Education, providing authoritative advice on evidence to improve teaching and learning. The EEF considers phonics to be one of the most secure and best-evidenced areas of pedagogy and recommends all schools use a systematic approach to teaching it. The DfE's *Early Career Framework*, which was quality assured by the EEF, sets out the expectation that all early career teachers learn about phonics and claims that SSP is the most effective approach for teaching pupils to decode.

### **Children at risk of reading failure**

Pupils who fail to learn to read early on start to dislike reading. The guidance emphasises that pupils need to keep up with their peers rather than be helped to catch up later, at a point when learning in the wider curriculum depends so much on literacy. Where pupils make insufficient progress, extra efforts should be made to provide them with extra practice and support from the beginning. In evaluating schools' teaching of reading, Ofsted's inspectors pay particular attention to pupils who are reading below what is expected for their age.

### **Leadership and management**

Since the national curriculum is statutory in state-maintained primary schools, teachers are required to teach a programme of systematic phonics from year 1. The EYFS statutory framework also refers to the first stages of systematic phonics. The guidance on leadership and management highlights the roles of school leaders in successfully implementing a programme, and training and supporting their staff to teach reading as effectively as possible.

Ofsted inspects how well primary schools teach their pupils to read using SSP. Inspectors listen to children reading, observe lessons, consider schools' policies for teaching reading, and take account of the outcomes of phonics assessments and data from the phonics screening checks.

Schools that need to improve their teaching of phonics may find the section on word reading and spelling particularly useful.

### **COVID-19 recovery**

The DfE recognises that extended school restrictions have had a substantial impact on children and young people's learning and is committed to helping pupils make up learning they have lost because of the pandemic. As reading is so important for accessing the rest of the curriculum, ensuring pupils catch up on their reading is essential. Accurate assessment to identify next steps is vital. Making progress depends on quality-first teaching: this guidance articulates what the excellent teaching of reading looks like.

Reading also offers important emotional benefits, enabling pupils, through listening to and talking about stories, to talk about their ideas and feelings and to lose themselves in books.

### **Other sources of support**

The Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework sets the standards that school and childcare providers must meet for the learning, development and care of children from birth to five in England. The DfE's 34 English Hubs offer support to schools to improve their teaching of early language, phonics and reading in Reception and year 1.

# Unemployment, welfare and education

*Let Them Learn: Further education colleges' support for the unemployed*, published by the Association of Colleges (AoC) on Wednesday 9 June, 2021.

<https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/LET%20THEM%20LEARN%20-%20FURTHER%20EDUCATION%20COLLEGES%E2%80%99%20SUPPORT%20FOR%20THE%20UNEMPLOYED.pdf>

**A** report, published by the Association of Colleges, has called on the Government to drop “unhelpful universal credit claimant rules” that had created an “education vs. work” divide. The report argued that current rules prevented people from participating in many learning or training courses if they received unemployment benefits.

The AoC warned that the current situation hampered progress on the Government's Plan for Jobs recovery strategy, by putting investment in the Lifetime Skills Guarantee out of reach to too many people. The report added that more joining up of skills and employment programmes would be vital to deliver plans to “build back better”.

The *Let Them Learn: Further education colleges' support for the unemployed*, report stressed that further education colleges were “supporting unemployed people in partnerships with their local Jobcentre Plus, despite the education and welfare system, not because of it. It highlighted how disconnected the education and welfare systems were, as they currently actively discouraged people from getting the skills they needed to move on to meaningful employment, which risked creating bigger tax burdens and slower economic growth.

The report pointed out that, while there were many excellent college-led initiatives across the country that were supporting local unemployed people through work with job centres and skills initiatives, they were not as widespread as they needed to be. The AoC added that, to make it work for employers, people at risk of becoming long-term unemployed and colleges, there would need to be a system that would embed, incentives, and invest in the role of colleges in supporting unemployed people on a national scale. They report concluded that the Skills and Post-16 Education Bill would provide the chance for the Government to make such a commitment. The AoC's report recommendations included:

- Reform universal credit rules so that no one would be prevented from being able to access training that would help them.
- Extend the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to everyone, not just those without any existing Level 3 qualifications.
- Embed the role of colleges in supporting unemployed people in the Skills and Post-Education Bill through legislation for Local Skills Improvement Plans to include partnerships with JobCentre Plus.
- Set out a national strategy for the role of education and skills in supporting employment, through a cross-departmental taskforce with DFE, BEIS, DWP, MHCLG and provide definite progression pathways for people on current programmes, such as, Kickstart and Restart.

The Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges, David Hughes, said that the very people who should be accessing the learning and preparation for work training, were the ones who were currently being excluded from it. He pointed out that those most likely to benefit would have to give up financial support to train and learn, and with no access to other maintenance support, they would likely have to forgo any chances of reskilling to live, eat and pay bills.

Mr Hughes said that the report had showed that such training prepared people for getting into secure, fulfilling jobs, and it was “entirely counterproductive” to pursue a hard-line policy of restricted training while job hunting. He called on the Government to create a coherent system that would span education and welfare and work for those at risk of long-term unemployment.

# Early years critical to education recovery plan

*Fairness First: Social Mobility, COVID and Education Recovery*, a policy brief published by the Sutton Trust. Published on Thursday 20 May 2021. <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Fairness-First-Social-Mobility-Covid-Education-Recovery.pdf>

**A** majority of parents of pre-school children (56%) are worried about the impact on their child's overall development or wellbeing during the pandemic, according to polling by YouGov, published by the Sutton Trust. One in five (20%) of the 570 parents of 2-4-year-olds surveyed thought that their child's physical development had been impacted negatively during the pandemic, and a quarter (25%) felt similarly about their language development. However, a much bigger concern for parents was the impact on their child's social and emotional development, cited by 52%.

When it came to the reasons behind the concerns, over two-thirds (69%) of parents believed that not being able to play with other children had negatively impacted their child, while a smaller proportion (63%) had report that being unable to see other close relatives had affected their child. As over half (51%) of parents felt that the Government had not done enough to support the development of all pre-school age children during the pandemic, the Trust has called on the Government to put the development and wellbeing of pre-school children at the heart of the education recovery plan. Key points were:

- While the pandemic had showed how crucial the early years sector was for the functioning of daily lives and children's futures, it had also laid bare the fragility of a sector which comprised many small and poorly funded private and voluntary providers, particularly those in less well-off areas.
- An increase in the Early Years Pupil Premium to levels equivalent to those in primary school would help, as well as increased rates of funding, to invest in a skilled workforce that could make the most impact. But above all, early years provision needed to be seen as an opportunity to provide a good start in life for all children, and not just as a way of providing childcare.
- The polling and brief had been published after research by the Education Endowment Foundation, which had found that 96% of schools had been concerned about the communication and language development of children starting school this year. Three-quarters (76%) felt that pupils starting school needed additional support compared to pre-pandemic cohorts.

Commenting on the call by the Sutton Trust to put the development and wellbeing of pre-school children at the heart of the education recovery plan, Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said that the area had received far too little attention from the Government, before and during the pandemic, despite the evidence of the crucial role that early years education played in children's outcomes and life chances. He pointed out that disadvantaged children were already 4.6 months of learning behind other children in their reception year at primary school and the gap widened during the course of their education to 18.1 months by the time they took their GCSEs. Mr Barton added that to have any hope of eliminating the manifest inequality, there must be a commitment to invest in high-quality early years education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds so that they could start school on equal terms with their peers.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of NAHT, said that a good way to mitigate the damage caused by coronavirus for young children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, would be by investing in early years education and family services. He stressed that it was critically important for the Government's education recovery plan to take into account more than just academic "catch-up". Mr Whiteman said that, while physical and language development was a concern, the survey had showed that parents were most concerned about the negative impact of lockdown on their child's social and emotional development, from not being able to play with other children. He argued that schools must be given the flexibility to focus their efforts on what they knew would work best for recovery and to address wellbeing as well as academic concerns..



# What businesses want from adult skills training provision in the UK

*Report of the Workplace Training and Development Commission*, the final report of the British Chambers of Commerce Workplace Training and Development Commission under the chairmanship of Jane Boardman, published in co-operation with Indeed on Wednesday 5 May 2021.

<https://www.britishchambers.org.uk/media/get/Workplace%20Training%20and%20Development%20Commission%20Report.pdf>

**A** skills report has called for major reform of the UK's training system to help businesses access the skills they need. Report of the Workplace Training and Development Commission, which is the final report from the Commission which had been set up by the British Chambers of Commerce in partnership with Indeed, followed an 18-month study of what businesses wanted from adult skills training provision in the UK.

The Commissioners, from a range of business and skills backgrounds, concluded that the report offered a blueprint for policy makers, trainers and firms to finally develop a system that would work for employers and employees. Hundreds of companies from a wide range of sectors joined Chambers of Commerce, colleges, universities, independent training providers, Local Enterprise Partnerships and education professionals in giving evidence to the Commission.

The report identified solutions to a series of obstacles for employers in using the current skills system, including issues of complexity, cost and inflexibility. It also highlighted the need for improved trust and co-operation between the different parties involved in skills planning and training provision, especially at local level. Other key recommendations included:

- Help for smaller firms to identify and invest in the skills needs of their workforce.
- More bite-sized, flexible learning which to support people in work to gain new skills faster.
- A greater say for businesses on what skills training was needed at local level.
- Better support for people to retrain and move into higher earning roles.
- A renewed focus on digital skills and innovation.

The report called on policymakers to adopt its recommendations and it encouraged businesses to act decisively to resolve their skills needs, to help bolster productivity and growth as the economy rebuilds following the pandemic.

Commenting on the findings, Jane Boardman, Chairman of the Commission, said that the problem of skills shortages had long hampered the UK economy, as it had left employers struggling to fill job vacancies and raise productivity. She stressed that as the workplace was rapidly becoming more digital and automated, businesses needed more people with the technical skills for the changing jobs. But Ms Boardman pointed out that too often, employers could not access the training they needed and, as a result, they were spending less and less on training each year. She said that the impact of the pandemic had made investing in adult skills more important than ever, as employers needed a more joined-up and flexible system that could respond quickly to skills needs and opportunities.

Hannah Essex, Co-Executive Director of the BCC and a member of the Commission, said that apprenticeships and technical qualifications were highly valued by businesses across many sectors and they were key to resolving some skills shortages. But she argued that full qualifications were not always the right

*(Continued on page 15.)*

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solution when it came to wider adult workforce training. Ms Essex argued that a more modular and agile approach would help businesses to address skills shortages more quickly, and as the economy emerged from the pandemic, individuals who want to change career and move into higher earning roles would need more opportunities to upskill and retrain.

She said that solving the UK's skills crisis would require coordinated effort across business, government and the skills sector, and crucially, there would need to be a more relevant, joined-up and flexible skills system to meet the needs of businesses wherever they were based in the UK. Ms Essex stressed that, key to success would be the full involvement of employers in local decisions on how to plan, deliver and fund the skills needed. But she added that there had already been positive change in the skills system, as recommendations from the Commission's interim report had been reflected in the Government White Paper on Further Education.

Pawel Adrjan, head of EMEA research at the job site Indeed, said that job postings on Indeed had grown 32% since the start of 2021 and they were at their highest level since last March as the economy geared up for a recovery. He pointed out that the types of available job opportunities were also changing, as construction, manufacturing, software development, health and social care accounted for a greater share of current vacancies than before the pandemic. Mr Adrjan stressed that growing demand for new workers and changes in the mix of available jobs, had put adult skills and training back at the top of the labour market policy agenda.

He said that people had had to adapt since COVID-19 and the report had showed that businesses wanted similar flexibility when it came to training. Mr Adrjan argued that a more locally integrated, flexible plan would ensure that the requirements of business would not only benefit employers but it would also help people who wanted higher-skilled, better paying jobs.

The Association of Colleges Chief Executive, David Hughes, said the report was a strong sign that employers understood and valued the importance of developing and nurturing their people, and for working in partnership with colleges to support a stronger adult-skills offer in every community. He argued that colleges needed to have more freedoms to meet local employer and learner needs, as the recent white paper had proposed, to enable them to work in partnership with more employers through local choice of course types and modules, flexible funding mechanisms and removing barriers within the welfare system.

Mr Hughes added that if the Government delivered such freedoms, colleges working with employers would be able to unlock the potential of people who needed to upgrade their skills, retrain for the jobs of the future and those who were already in work who needed to update their knowledge.

Kate Green MP, Labour's Shadow Education Secretary, said that a decade of Conservative cuts had weakened the foundations of the UK's skills system, as training opportunities for adult learners had been disappearing and skills shortages were holding businesses back.

***“The Association of Colleges Chief Executive, David Hughes, said the report was a strong sign that employers understood and valued the importance of developing and nurturing their people, and for working in partnership with colleges to support a stronger adult-skills offer in every community. He argued that colleges needed to have more freedoms to meet local employer and learner needs, as the recent white paper had proposed, to enable them to work in partnership with more employers through local choice of course ...”***

# Adult education and skills a missed opportunity

*Big Changes Ahead for Adult Education Funding? Definitely Maybe*, by Luke Sibieta, Imran Tahir and Ben Waltmann, Institute for Fiscal Studies, IFS 325, Briefing note published on Thursday 22 April, 2021.  
<https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/15405>

**W**hile the Government has sought to make reforming adult education and skills policy a key priority, including the recent White Paper to communicate the Government's strategy. However, researchers at the Institute for Fiscal Studies have warned that many key details had been either missing or left to further consultation. The researchers argued that, rather than just another statement of good intentions, a serious attempt to improve adult education and skills would be needed.

The report focused on reforms to post-18 funding, and found that:

- Spending and learner numbers had fallen substantially. Total public spending on adult education and apprenticeships had fallen by a third over the last decade, and spending on traditional adult education had fallen by 50% in real terms, while learner numbers had fallen by more than a third since 2010.
- There was a distinct lack of detail on what the key spending commitment, the National Skills Fund, would mean in practice. The National Skills Fund seemed to commit to spending an extra £2.5 billion on adult skills over the parliament (or the equivalent of about an extra £625 million per year for four years), which would reverse about a third of the cuts to adult education spending over the 2010s. However, beyond 2021–22, there was a lack of detail in terms of what the National Skills Fund would cover and how it would be spent.
- The Government has restored the entitlement to free A-level-equivalent or Level 3 courses for adults without qualifications at the level, but it will be restricted to courses in “high-priority” areas, which excludes areas such as hospitality, tourism and media.
- The White Paper suggested changing the adult education funding system, but it had set out few details and committed only to a consultation. However, the current system is overly-complex, too focused on the short term and it provided perverse incentives just to get numbers up.
- The White Paper proposed a Lifelong Loan Entitlement to give everyone access to funding for the equivalent of four years of post-18 education and sensibly remove arbitrary distinctions between further education and higher education courses. However, a number of important details had been left to be worked out. Courses that had been classed as “approved higher technical qualifications” would become eligible for extra funding, but it was not clear how it would be determined and what would happen to other courses, which would have a major bearing on the effects and cost.
- Equivalent or lower qualification funding rules currently prevent adults from receiving public funding for qualifications at the same or lower levels to those they already possess. Relaxing the rules would enable more retraining, and the government-commissioned Augar Review of post-18 education had proposed scrapping them entirely. But although it was time for action rather than words, the Government has not made a commitment, instead, it had said that it would consult further at some point.

Imran Tahir, Research Economist at IFS and a co-author, said there was a strong case for reforming further and adult education funding, as spending and learner numbers had fallen substantially over the last decade. He warned that economic and technological changes would be likely to increase demand for new skills and retraining, but the current system of support created arbitrary distinctions between further and higher education courses, and it actually discouraged flexibility and retraining.

# FE White Paper - ideas into action

*FE White Paper 2021: Ideas into Action*, a paper by 12 authors who represent a range of practitioners from leadership teams through to curriculum specialists and policy experts. Published by the Further Education Trust for Leadership (FETL) with support from Education and Skills (EDSK) on Monday 23 March, 2021.

<https://fetl.org.uk/publications/fe-white-paper-2021-ideas-to-action/>

**This report contains the insights, expertise and experiences of a range of practitioners from leadership teams through to curriculum specialists and policy experts. Their contributions outline their respective visions of how and where FE can play a significant role in strengthening our society and economy in future. The report makes seven recommendations to government.**

1. The national network of FE colleges in cities, towns and communities across England already forms the backbone of our skills system and this should underpin all our collective efforts to increase skill levels in every part of the workforce. In this context, it is important that the Government focuses on adding value to this network of providers instead of duplicating existing provision. The devolution agenda and an outcomes-based accountability system are potentially important components of a push for a more localised 'placebased' approach, as learners should not have to travel long distances to develop the skills that matter to them. A placebased approach will also help colleges to support those living in 'left behind' communities.
2. Any redesign of the skills system in the coming years needs to make sure that collaboration between FE providers is prioritised over competition. This will provide the right conditions for colleges to become more specialised in terms of their curriculum, expertise, staffing and resources, which should result in a greater focus on quality over quantity. The creation of Local Skills Improvement Plans as well as the advent of Institutes of Technology could potentially support efforts to encourage greater collaboration and specialisation. Improved governance and oversight of colleges will become even more crucial.
3. The employer-college relationship, which sits at the heart of the FE White Paper, needs to be viewed as a two-way street in which colleges are there to both stimulate and respond to the needs of employers in their local areas.
4. Funding has been a longstanding concern in the FE sector, but recent years have given greater cause for optimism that colleges will now receive the funding they need and deserve. Almost all the White Paper's proposals will depend, at least in part, on colleges having access to sufficient funding on a stable long-term basis in order to deliver the right courses, equipment and buildings in their local area to meet employer demand. In this regard, the National Skills Fund and the new Lifelong Learning Entitlement have considerable potential, but their success is still dependent on long-term funding commitments.
5. More needs to be done to support younger learners to ensure that the range of schemes being offered to them across government departments is helping, rather than hindering, their efforts to embark on their chosen careers. Initiatives such as T levels, Kickstart and apprenticeships can all contribute to improving the prospects of young people, particularly as the economy begins to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.
6. The recent investments from Government in adult learners, such as the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, has been widely welcomed, yet there are still more challenges that must be addressed if these initiatives are to reach the adults who need them the most. Reskilling and upskilling will be crucial elements of our post-COVID skills system, but it is not yet certain whether the Government is investing in the right way to achieve this goal. The Government must also be careful not to assume that every learner is able and willing to improve their skills. For example, many adults face significant financial and logistical hurdles to participating in training courses, which must be carefully considered by policymakers as they design new schemes and reform existing ones.
7. Given that we live in a time of rapid technological change, more emphasis needs to be placed on encouraging innovation and embedding digital skills more broadly. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a transformation in the way that learning is delivered across the country. It will now be necessary for colleges to build on the events of the past year with a forward-looking approach to technology and inclusion that ensures the FE sector can connect learners to the right course at the right time, in a way that suits the learner's needs at any given moment.

# The Phonics Screening Check 2012-2022: tracking and tracing changes in government policy

By Margaret M Clark OBE

**T**he phonics screening check introduced in 2012 as a statutory assessment has increasingly come to dominate early years classrooms in England (see Clark, M.M. 2019 'The phonics Screening Check 2012-2019: a critique' *Education Journal* 387: 23-26). The check of 40 words, 20 real and 20 pseudo words, has each year since 2012 been administered in June to Year 1 children aged around 6 years of age.

From 2013 to 2019 any children who failed to achieve the standard expected, a pass mark of 32, were required to re-sit the check in year 2. Over the same period synthetic phonics has been the method required by the Government for teaching all children to read. Ofsted now also requires institutions who wish to be validated for the training of primary teachers to promote synthetic phonics in their literacy courses as the method of teaching early reading. Over these years I have published two research reports, edited books with international contributors and articles critiquing this policy. The two reports, my more recent articles and my reference list can be accessed through a link at Newman University where they can be read and downloaded.

Over the period 2012-2019 the check has become a high stakes test with schools expected each year to raise their percentage pass. The School Standards Minister, Nick Gibb, has repeatedly used the increase in percentage pass on the check over these years as evidence of the success of the Government's insistence that synthetic phonics should be the way to teach all children to read, and as the measure of a school's success in teaching reading. As recently as 9 June 2021, in answer to a written question in parliament from Emma Hardy (7927) quoted in *Education Parliamentary Monitor* he repeated this claim citing the increase in percentage pass on the check since its introduction in 2012. In December 2020 I published an article questioning whether ideology trumps evidence in the formation of government policy for primary schools and for institutions involved in initial teacher education in England (*Education Journal Review*, Vol. 26 No. 3: 2-17).

## **Cancellation of check for June 2020 (followed by requirement to test year 2 children in the Autumn Term 2020)**

It was decided to cancel the testing on the PSC for June 2020 because of the closing of schools as a consequence of the pandemic. However, the Government later decided to require the schools in the Autumn Term 2020 to administer the check to year 2 children to determine which children should be required to sit the check in June 2021. Only children who failed to achieve a mark of at least 32 were to be tested in June 2021 along with year 1 children. As the papers for 2020 had been shredded the schools were allowed to select the check for 2017, 2018 or 2019 to administer.

In the same issue of *Education Journal Review* (pages 18-22) my article from *Education Journal* issue 435: 23-26, *The administration of the Phonics Screening Check in the autumn term 2020 to Year 2 children in England: why at what cost to teachers and children?* was reprinted. I expressed concern about the requirement that schools test all year 2 children on the check in the Autumn Term 2020, which seemed an imposition on schools at that time with COVID cases among children and staff. Following my article, I sent Freedom of Information Questions to DfE for clarification about anomalies in the instructions to schools. My questions were sent on 22 December, and I received a response on 14 January 2021. No reference was made in the response I received to the fact that DfE by then had decided to postpone the testing on the PSC until June 2022, by which time those Year 2 children who had been tested would no longer be in year 2!

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### **Plans to assess years 1 and 2 children in June 2021 confirmed, then cancelled**

In December 2020, the Standards and Testing Agency published a document setting out full details about the proposed testing on the PSC which was to take place in June 2021. However, I learnt that a decision to postpone the testing until June 2022 had been taken before the final date in January by which local authorities were required to send the results of the Autumn term testing to DfE. In GOV.UK *Primary assessments: future dates 2020/21* published on 18 January it was announced that: “The national curriculum assessments due to be held in the summer term 2021, including tests, teacher assessments and the phonics screening check, have been cancelled.”

I approached a number of schools to find out whether they were aware of this change in policy. As I was unable to establish either when or by whom they were informed I submitted a series of further Freedom of Information Questions to DfE on 30 April to which I received a reply on 1 June 2021. The following are my questions and the answers I received:

1. The Standards and Testing Agency was responsible for informing schools and other stakeholders of the cancellation and this information was sent on 7 January and followed by a reminder on 18 January. I was informed that LAs were not responsible for informing schools.
2. I enquired how many local authorities had as required returned the results of the Autumn Term assessment of year 2 pupils and from how many LAs no return had been received. The response was that all 151 local authorities had returned the results to the DfE.
3. I asked from how many schools nationally returns had been received, from how many schools no returns had been received, and what reasons had been given for non-returns. In total 16,397 schools nationally submitted returns and a total of 178 schools did not return the autumn term results. It was stated that DfE “did not have a record of the reasons as to why these schools did not return their results”.
4. It was stated that the Department received returns for 95% of eligible pupils.
5. As schools had the choice of whether to use the tests from 2017, 2018 or 2019 I enquired whether schools had been asked to indicate which tests they had used. The reply I received was that: “The 2017, 2018 and 2019 phonics screening checks are statistically linked, meaning the standard expected to meet the threshold remains the same across all three previous years. Therefore, it was unnecessary for schools to indicate which check they used ...”
6. Finally, I enquired whether it was intended to publish or otherwise use the data from the autumn assessments now that it had been decided to cancel the testing for June 2021. It was stated that as: “The data from the autumn 2020 phonics screening check was intended to only be used to determine which year 2 pupils have not met the expected standard in phonics and who were therefore expected to take the statutory check in June 2021 (alongside year 1 pupils). Given that the June 2021 phonics screening check has been cancelled, the data will no longer be used for this purpose. We do not intend to publish the results from the autumn 2020 phonics screening check or use it for any other purpose.” This response was prepared by the Standards and Testing Agency.

It does now appear that at a time when schools were under so many other pressures the decision to require them to administer the check to year 2 pupils was an added but unnecessary pressure. Furthermore, there is now a large amount of stored data which is no longer relevant.

### **Decision to require schools to assess year 2 children on the check in the Autumn Term 2021**

On 16 June there has been yet another change of policy, the announcement merely embedded in a speech by the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, at the Festival of Education. He stated that

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schools would be required not only to test reception class children on the baseline assessment in the Autumn Term 2021 but also to test year 2 children on the phonics screening check. No explanation was given for this latest change of policy.

In a press release that day Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union, said: “The last thing children need after COVID-19 is another test which won’t tell teachers anything new or helpful about their pupils and will simply put them under more pressure. Children who ‘fail’ the test will be required to re-sit the test in the summer term. This is no message to give to pupils who have just experienced huge disruption to their education due to the pandemic.”

In our research report in 2018 we revealed that many teachers and parents found that the phonics screening check did not tell them anything they did not already know and yet no consultation with either teachers or parents has taken place to establish whether the check should remain a statutory assessment, dominating as it does the early years curriculum in many classrooms. In his latest written answer in Parliament on 9 June 2021 Nick Gibb’s comments are slightly more constrained than on previous occasions. While still claiming that “There is sound evidence that systematic phonics is a highly effective method for teaching early reading”, he has here omitted the word ‘synthetic’ before phonics in this latest statement and added: “The evidence indicates that the teaching of phonics is most effective when combined with a language-rich curriculum.” These are two qualifications not found in his many previous statements! (Note: In a Special Issue in July 2019 *Education Journal* 379: 1-39, entitled: ‘*Literacy policy, synthetic phonics and the phonics screening check*’, a number of my relevant articles were reprinted.)

In view of the time and money still being spent on the phonics screening check it is worth reminding readers of four points I made there in my summary (see pages 37-9). Further evidence is to be found in my numerous publications and in those of others whom I cite.

1. Many of the teachers and parents responding to an independent survey in May 2018 expressed the view that the phonics screening check should be discontinued and certainly should not remain a statutory assessment. Singled out for particular criticism were the pseudo words and the fact that the check was not diagnostic but merely identified children as passing or failing depending on whether or not they gained a mark of 32.
2. There is evidence of the unreliability of the check, also the high percentage of younger children, particularly boys, among those failing the check and no corrections is made for age.
3. The two researches cited by the government for their claim that their policy is evidence based and that all children should learn to read using synthetic phonics have been widely criticised.
4. The improved results of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study PIRLS 2016 for England have been attributed by the Government to its phonics policy and the screening check. This is a questionable claim. It should also be noted that Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with very different policies, and where collaboration with the teaching profession features extensively, both ranked statistically higher than England, yet no lessons in England seem to be learnt from these other countries.

Surely it is time for the teachers in England to be consulted and for the Government to stop issuing contradictory edicts to the profession and expecting them to conform!

# EEF publishes findings from Big Lockdown - Learning Parent Survey

**F**ixed daily routines for work submissions, specific and frequent feedback from teachers, and the use of live lessons had been associated with more positive perceptions of home learning for parents, according to the findings from the Big Lockdown-Learning Parent Survey, published by the Education Endowment Foundation.

The survey had been conducted using a survey app called Parent Ping, which had involved parents and carers answering daily questions about their child's experience of learning at home. The research had aimed to provide insights into primary school parents' and children's experiences during the period of partial school closures at the beginning of 2021. Launched at the end of January, it collected daily responses from around 2,300 parents whose children had attended the 86 state primary schools that had taken part in the study.

The study had found little difference between schools or socio-demographic groups in how successful parents believed home learning to be. Parents had been asked to answer 2-5 questions per day for a period of six weeks. But not every parent had answered a question every day, as daily response rates had varied from 900 -1,200. Over 300 teachers from the participating schools had also completed a one-off survey about their schools' approaches to home learning. The research had been led by Education Intelligence Limited and supported by the Education Endowment Foundation.

The study found that while there had been little difference between schools or socio-demographic groups in how successful parents thought home learning was, parents eligible for free school meals, single parent families and families with more than one child, had reported slightly less-positive perceptions of the success of home learning than other families. However, the study had identified four challenges that families faced that had been strongly associated with whether home learning had been perceived to be successful:

- The digital divide. Families without enough devices or other technological challenges had reported very low perceptions of success of home learning.
- Balancing remote learning with other responsibilities. 62% of parents had reported struggling to combine home schooling with other commitments, and those parents had reported lower perceptions of success of learning at home.
- Confidence in supporting learning. Parents who had reported struggling to understand the work set, had low confidence in supporting learning and low confidence about supporting their children's behaviour and emotions had reported lower success of learning at home. There was therefore an opportunity for schools to learn about what particularly led parents to struggle to understand work that had been set for completion at home, as it may have helped families with weekly homework assignments.
- Parental perceptions of their child's attitude towards learning, had been a reminder that the challenge of supporting home learning in part depended on how keen the child was to complete the work independently and that, regardless of how schools supported families, there would always be considerable variation.

The researchers said that, while the study had given important insight into parents' and teachers' experiences of remote learning, it would be important to note that the results of the study were not generalisable to all parents and schools nationally, because schools and parents had self-selected to participate in the study. However, the parents and schools in the study had been a good representation of the national population of primary schools in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics.

# Shelves and typographies: their potential for promoting literacy

By Andrew K. Shenton  
Academic Researcher

**In our more reflective moments, no doubt many of us have wondered what we can do to render reading more attractive to young people and how we can best highlight its benefits. The need to stimulate reading has, of course, assumed an added importance in recent months when so much traditional education has been suspended and conventional face-to-face, teacher-led instruction has been impossible. In these circumstances, pupils have had to study more independently, and the motivation and ability to read without constant prompting have often been prerequisites in the new modes of learning.**

We may draw inspiration from Charles W. Eliot, who, in 1909, whilst President of Harvard University, famously argued that all that was essentially needed for a complete liberal education was a set of books that could be fitted on a shelf only five feet in length.<sup>1</sup> Eliot's belief has attracted renewed attention in recent times, with the firm, Blackwell's launching a collection of seventy works for inclusion on its Five Foot Bookshelf,<sup>2</sup> and BBC Radio Four broadcasting a programme featuring suggestions from modern readers as to what they would include on their own such shelf.<sup>3</sup>

Eliot's idea can be exploited by us in schools, too. It may, for example, serve as a central principle to help pupils determine which titles they themselves might recommend in a book review project. We may add by way of clarification that any item which is proposed should enrich our lives, inform us or benefit us in some other significant way. This is, however, a broad basis for nomination and an effective means of focusing the territory can lie in tying Eliot's claim to one of the many typologies of young people's information needs. Without such elaboration, the danger arises that book review projects may do no more than encourage pupils to indulge themselves by describing favourite books they have read in the past, and their advocates give scant attention to their value to either themselves or others.

Over a period of several decades, various information need typologies have been constructed, often by academics, with the aim of identifying systematically the kinds of information that are necessary in life. The breakdowns offer considerable possibilities in the classroom for emphasising the importance of literacy but because they are usually outcomes of research in information science they remain largely unknown in education. In an early typology of young people's information needs that is still useful today, Regina Minudri formulated five divisions.<sup>4</sup> These can be recast as requirements for any book if it is to merit a place on our imaginary shelf. We may say that, for a work to be included, it must deliver one or more of the following benefits, and the contribution the item makes in this area should be addressed explicitly in the review:

- support or advance pupils' learning in school;
- help youngsters enjoy their recreation;
- enable them to grow as people;
- furnish them with insights that will aid their pursuit of a particular career;
- encourage them to gain skills which will bring a sense of accomplishment or gratification.

At this point, we may shift our attention from the focus on book reviewing to a wider demonstration of the importance of literature. Once all the reviews pertaining to the same criterion are united, it is usually straightforward to induct a statement that explains the broader value in an educational sense of the books within the relevant category. Links can also be forged with individual items in the school library so as to illustrate further the scope of each criterion and to promote the in-house collection. In school libraries, non-fiction tends to be arranged either under staff-imposed subject headings or according to divisions derived from the Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme, whilst fiction is typically organised either in a straight alphabetical sequence based on the author's surname or within genre categories. Such methods do little to highlight the utility of the items and are indicative of a bibliographic paradigm whose imposition of order is

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appreciated more by librarians than library users. Only when books are seen in terms of an information needs typology might pupils begin to understand how the contents of the collection can help them personally.

Looking beyond Minudri's work, other typologies of information needs offer similar potential. One, devised by Virginia Walter, emerged from Maslow's more general hierarchy of human needs.<sup>5</sup> It should be stressed, though, that such breakdowns deal with information, rather than books specifically, and it is not necessarily the case, of course, that pupils will consult books in order to satisfy their needs in this regard. No doubt some teachers will feel that if demonstrations of the purposes that reading can satisfy are successful in stimulating the development or practice of the skill, the fact that young people may choose to exploit non-book-related channels is relatively unimportant.

Nevertheless, traditionalists among us will, no doubt, prefer to see books occupy a special place in the lives of pupils as objects of beauty and for their ability to make available rich material that Web pages frequently lack. All of us may be more anxious knowing that information is not necessarily textual at all and, increasingly, it takes other forms – young people may go to podcasts, video presentations or other people, for example, to meet their needs. In the event of pupils accessing most of their information in these ways and text being effectively sidelined, the skill of reading is clearly under threat. Ensuring that detailed reading and the application of higher order skills such as skimming, scanning, receptive reading and reflective reading<sup>6</sup> are not confined to the classroom has become one of the greatest challenges facing literacy advocates today.

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# The evolution of cognitive skills during childhood across the UK

*The Evolution of Cognitive Skills During Childhood Across the UK*, by Luke Sabieta and Joshua Fullard, Education Policy Institute, published on 9 July 2021.

[https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/EPI\\_UK-Comparisons-Cognitive-outcomes-1.pdf](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/EPI_UK-Comparisons-Cognitive-outcomes-1.pdf)

**A** report from the Education Policy Institute, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, has offered insights into the educational outcomes of pupils in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland since devolution. The study, draws on the detailed Millennium Cohort Study of children born around 2000, and compares outcomes in reading, vocabulary, language and maths, found that pupils in Wales had performed much closer to those in England than had been previously reported in international PISA results, where Wales had trailed England significantly.

Scottish pupils had performed better than other UK nations at a very young age, but the lead had quickly receded as Scottish pupils got older, which had left them behind England in most performance measures, particularly in maths.

Pupils in Northern Ireland had led the way among UK nations in most measures of pupil outcomes, and they had been ahead of those in London, and the highly positive outcomes displayed by pupils in Northern Ireland through the EPI study had been more positive than in other international comparisons. The four nations of the UK had increasingly taken separate paths in terms of education policy since devolution in 1999, and while England had focused on increasing school autonomy, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had abolished league tables and external testing. The study had been one of the few to explore how the divergence may have affected pupil performance over the last two decades.

The researchers argued that, while policymakers typically turned to the OECD's PISA results to compare pupil performance to their international counterparts, the assessments provided only a snapshot of pupil outcomes at the age of 15, which missed how they had evolved throughout childhood. The EPI study had also showed how UK countries performed across a range of educational and skills measures throughout childhood from age 3 to 14. Unlike previous international comparisons, the report had also controlled for several differences in pupils' demographics, socio-economic backgrounds and early life conditions, to allow for more similar comparisons. The report's key findings included:

- Pupils in Wales performed at a similar level to pupils in England, with the exception of reading.
- The educational outcomes and skills of pupils in Wales were largely similar to those in England. The findings from the UK Millennium Cohort Study were in contrast to those in the international PISA results, which had shown Wales' performance as being a lot further behind England.
- While performance was largely similar in England and Wales, there the exception was lower performance in reading outcomes in Wales, particularly in reading for young children at the age of 7.
- Wales' poorer performance in reading appeared to be an established, long-term problem, as it had also been reflected in PISA results.
- Scottish children performed well at a young age, but the gain had quickly faded as they got older, and pupils had fallen behind their English peers, especially in maths.
- Children in Scotland had the highest educational outcomes and skills when starting out in life, at the age of three. But despite the strong starting position, performance had fallen behind other UK nations at later ages in most outcomes, particularly in maths.

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- These findings were despite parents in Scotland having higher levels of education than parents in other parts of the UK and the relatively advantageous position had not been reflected in the educational outcomes of the younger Scottish generation.
- The Millennium Cohort Study findings showing poor performance in maths had been supported by international PISA results, which had showed that performance in maths had been declining over time. However, recent evidence had raised some questions about the reliability of Scotland's PISA results.
- From age 5 until the teenage years, children in Northern Ireland had displayed the highest scores on almost all key education and skill outcomes, to perform at least level with or significantly above England on all measures.
- These findings for Northern Ireland were more positive than the picture shown in other international comparisons. Higher educational performance was particularly apparent for children in Northern Ireland in low-income families or families with low education levels.
- As almost all educational outcomes for pupils in Northern Ireland were measured between the ages of 3 and 11, the positive results for Northern Ireland were highly unlikely to reflect the impact of having attended grammar schools.

The report pointed out that pupils in the UK would have been affected by significant policy changes in the early and mid-2000s, such as the abolition of league tables in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the ending of SATs tests in Scotland and Wales. The researchers suggested that it may be possible that the lower pupil performance in Wales and Scotland in some areas, had been driven by these changes, as there was direct evidence for the finding in Wales.

However, the report argued that focusing solely on the impact league tables was too simplistic, as observed outcomes had been highest in Northern Ireland, where league tables had also been abolished. Outcomes had also differed by subject and skill, and the worse reading outcomes were in Wales, while the worse maths outcomes were in Scotland. The researchers therefore recommended that more attention should be paid to differences in pedagogical approaches and the curriculum, which would be particularly important given the recent big changes and development of different school curriculums across the UK.

Commenting on the EPI study comparing pupil performance among UK nations, Geoff Barton, General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said that while the report had provided food for thought, was no one right way or wrong way of running an education system and outcomes for children and young people were determined by a multiplicity of factors. He argued that the key goal must be to focus relentlessly on improving outcomes for disadvantaged young people to improve their life chances and produce the greatest social and economic benefits.

Mr Barton claimed that the study had also provided a badly needed corollary to the negative perception about educational outcomes in PISA rankings in Wales in recent years, as it was making great strides towards implementing an ambitious new 21st century curriculum.

Eithne Hughes, Director of ASCL Cymru, said that the EPI report would give schools and colleges in Wales, a timely shot in the arm, following the disruption caused by the pandemic. She pointed out that Welsh primary schools were working hard to address performance in reading, especially among pupils aged up to seven years old, as the progress made in the formative years of education could be crucial in enabling them to access other parts of the curriculum.

Robert Wilson, Regional Officer at ASCL Northern Ireland, said that he had been particularly proud of the demonstrably higher educational performance among children in Northern Ireland from low-income families and families with low education levels, as well as the positive comparisons that had been drawn with London.

# Young children's attention and persistence impacts their learning more than deprivation

**T**wo reports, *IELS Thematic Report: Young children's development and deprivation in England* and *IELS Thematic Report: Young children's physical development in England*, produced by the National Foundation for Educational Research, and funded by the Department for Education have been based on further analysis of data from the International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study (IELS), to look at how deprivation and physical development relate to the learning outcomes of five-year-old children in England.

The research concluded that young children's attention and persistence had a stronger relationship with their learning than deprivation, and it had highlighted the importance of focusing on young children's physical development as well as their academic skills. The key findings from the reports included:

- Children's attention and persistence were more strongly related to their learning outcomes than deprivation.
- Children who had been on task to a large extent during the direct IELS assessments had showed greater development than children who had not been on task at all, after taking other characteristics (including deprivation) into account. The differences had been the equivalent to about nine months in emergent numeracy (counting, working with numbers, shape and space, measurement and pattern), nine months in emotion identification (the ability to recognise others' emotions), ten months in emergent literacy (which focused on children's oral language) and 14 months in mental flexibility (the ability to apply different rules or adapt your thinking to changing circumstances).
- The analysis had also revealed that children who were always persistent had greater development than children who were never persistent. The difference was equivalent to about seven months in emergent literacy, emergent numeracy and mental flexibility and about eight months in emotion identification.
- Both family-level and school-level deprivation are related to children's development at age five.
- The research revealed that the difference between children from high and low socio-economic status backgrounds (in terms of parental occupation, parental education and income) had been equivalent to about two months in emergent literacy, two months in mental flexibility and around one month in emergent numeracy.
- Children attending schools in the most deprived areas had been approximately five months behind in emergent literacy development and approximately four months behind in emergent numeracy development, compared with children attending a school in the least deprived areas.
- Children attending schools with a high proportion of Free School Meals pupils were found to have lower development in emotion identification compared to children attending schools with a low proportion

***“The analysis had also revealed that children who were always persistent had greater development than children who were never persistent. The difference was equivalent to about seven months in emergent literacy, emergent numeracy and mental flexibility and about eight months in emotion identification.”***

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of FSM pupils. The difference was equivalent to approximately four months.

- Children’s physical development was related to other key learning outcomes at age five.

The report underlined the importance of supporting young children’s physical development as well as their academic skills as part of the COVID-19 recovery, as focusing exclusively on cognitive skills ran the risk of less development in the area than a balanced focus on physical, cognitive and social-emotional skills.

Fine motor development had been associated with larger differences, as children with greater fine motor development had greater development in other areas, equivalent to about five months of difference in emergent literacy and emergent numeracy, and four months in emotion identification and mental flexibility.

Greater gross motor development had been associated with about four months of difference in mental flexibility, three months in emergent literacy and emergent numeracy, and two months in emotion identification.

Having a special educational need was a risk factor for gross and fine motor development and as previous research had found that difficulties with motor skills could be an indicator of unidentified special educational needs, which underlined the importance of early intervention and support for children with SEN.

For fine motor development, the analysis had found a difference of approximately nine months of development between children with an identified SEN and those without. That was also the case even though the majority of children in the study with an identified SEN had difficulties with communication and interaction, rather than physical disabilities.

Additional risk factors for fine motor skill development were being younger (closer to four years 11 months than six years 0 months) and being a boy, as the research had identified that boys’ fine motor skills were approximately eight months behind those of girls’ at age five.

Caroline Sharp, co-author and Research Director at NFER, said that the findings had showed that young children’s attention and persistence were related to their development and families and educators could help children to develop the important skills. She said that the findings would help to understand more about the impact of disadvantage on young children’s development and the relationship between cognitive and physical development.

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# OECD PISA report on developing literacy skills in a digital world

PISA. *21st Century Readers: Developing literacy skills in a digital world*, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), OECD Publishing, Paris, Tuesday 4 May 2021.

ISBN 978-92-64-32422-0 (print), ISBN 978-92-64-67097-6 (pdf).

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**T**his substantial volume of research is taken from the last round of PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment, and looks in detail at how 15-year-old students are developing reading skills to navigate the technology-rich 21st century. As Professor Andreas Schleicher, Director of the OECD Education and Skills Directorate, observes in the editorial at the beginning of this report, “Globalisation and digitalisation have connected people, cities, countries and continents in ways that vastly increase our individual and collective potential. But the same forces have also made the world more volatile, more complex, more uncertain and more ambiguous. In this world, education is no longer just about teaching students something but about helping them develop a reliable compass and the tools to navigate ambiguity. Literacy in the 20th century was about extracting and processing pre-coded and – for school students – usually carefully curated information; in the 21st century, it is about constructing and validating knowledge. In the past, teachers could tell students to look up information in an encyclopaedia and to rely on that information as accurate and true. Nowadays, Google presents them with millions of answers and nobody tells them what is right or wrong, and true or not true. The more knowledge technology allows us to search and access, the more important it is to develop deep understanding and the capacity to navigate ambiguity, triangulate viewpoints, and make sense out of content.”

The most recent round of PISA, in 2018, showed that when 15-year-old pupils were confronted with literacy tasks that required them to understand implicit cues contained in the content or source of the information, an average of just 9% of them in OECD countries had enough of a reading proficiency level to be able to successfully distinguish facts from opinions. True, this figure is up from 7% in 2000 but, in the meantime, the demand for literacy skills has fundamentally changed.

We now have a situation where advancements in literacy skills have fallen sharply behind the evolution of the nature of information, and this has profound consequences in a world where virality seems sometimes privileged over quality in the distribution of information. In the “post-truth” climate in which we now find ourselves, assertions that “feel right” but have no basis in fact become accepted as fact. Algorithms that sort us into groups of like-minded individuals create social media echo chambers that amplify our views and leave us insulated from opposing arguments that may alter our beliefs. These virtual bubbles homogenise opinions and polarise our societies; and they can have a significant – and adverse – impact on democratic processes. Those algorithms are not a design flaw; as Professor Schleicher makes clear, they are how social media work. There is a “scarcity of attention but an abundance of information. We are living in this digital bazaar where anything that is not built for the network age is cracking apart under its pressure. The question is then: How can we live successfully in this new world of information? Do we approach the issue from a consumer protection or supply side angle? In modern societies, it seems impossible to treat knowledge in the same way we treat physical products; that is, by making sure they meet consumer protection regulations: requiring information to comply with ‘protective’ standards would

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be perceived as an immediate threat to democratic principles.”

The result of this is that the market for information remains unregulated. Can and should we place certain constraints on the behaviour and pronouncements of the influential and powerful? Can and should we introduce more robust standards for our gatekeepers, the journalists, who play such an important role in holding power to account? Has the time come to extend consumer protection to people as absorbers of information, who are – let us not forget – voters? And if we do so, how will this restrict freedom of speech and creativity in knowledge creation? Transparency in political advertising in the social media sphere also merits closer attention given its increasingly prevalent use. The degree and sophistication of targeting techniques being deployed are astounding and they are poorly understood by the majority of social media users.

This report, based on the PISA data, takes a different but equally important perspective, which is to focus on the skills angle. It looks at ways to strengthen students’ capacity to navigate the new world of information. It studies the ways in which students access digital technology, how skilled they are with complex digital reading tasks – and how this varies by geography, social background or gender. It also explores what teachers do to help students navigate ambiguity and manage complexity.

The good news is that education can make a difference. The report shows that education systems in which more students are taught digital skills have a higher percentage of students who can correctly distinguish facts from opinions in the PISA tasks. On average across OECD countries, 54% of students said they were trained at school to recognise whether information is biased or not. This proportion varies across countries. It is also interesting that the relationship between students’ access to training on how to detect biased information and their capacity to actually distinguish fact from opinion plays out quite differently across countries. There seems to be room for countries and schools to learn from each other how to implement such training programmes most successfully.

The report highlights how countries need to redouble their efforts to combat emerging digital divides. The data behind this report was gathered before the COVID-19 pandemic, but that has made this an even greater priority than it appeared to be at the time the PISA data was gathered in 2018. Disadvantaged students from OECD countries are increasingly losing the cultural capital of having books in their home-learning environments. And many of the most disadvantaged students can only access computers linked to the Internet at school.

The good news is that the strategies and tools to address these challenges and develop 21st-century literacy skills are ready. They are being tried and tested by teachers all around the world who have understood what it means to educate students for their future, rather than for our past.

### **Key findings**

Digital technologies revolutionised the written word in the 21st century. In the past, mass production of printed books made information widely available and incentivised people to develop reading skills. Still, the production of books remained in the hands of the few, not the many. With digital technologies, all that has changed. Everyone can become a journalist or a publisher.

People now find millions of answers to their questions on the Internet but what they have lost is the certainty of what is right or wrong, true or not true. Literacy in the 21st century is about constructing and validating knowledge. The more information there is, the more readers have to know how to navigate through ambiguity, and triangulate and validate viewpoints.

Reading in a digital world is even more challenging given the increasing production and consumption of media content. All too often the speed of information dissemination comes before the quality of the information itself. This contributes to “fake news”, misinformation and a “post-truth” climate. Social media algorithms are designed to channel the flow of likeminded people towards each other. This creates “echo chambers”, which reinforce our thoughts and opinions rather than challenge them, fuelling people’s confirmation bias. The digital divide exacerbates these challenges for the most disadvantaged. Many students do not have access to the Internet at home and must rely on schools to learn and practice their digital skills.

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Reading was the main subject assessed in PISA 2018, and the reading framework was devised to include essential reading skills in a digital world. This report provides important insights into how 15-year-old students are developing reading skills to navigate the technology-rich 21st century.

### **Digital divide**

- On average across OECD countries, some 88% of students had both a connection to the Internet at home and a computer they could use for schoolwork in PISA 2018 (OECD average-31: 89%) – 28 percentage points more than in PISA 2003 (OECD average-31).
- Half or less of students had access to both a connection to the Internet at home and a computer they could use for schoolwork in the Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam. This percentage was lower than 20% in rural areas of Indonesia, Mexico, Morocco and the Philippines.
- Four in five disadvantaged students in Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, the Philippines and Viet Nam do not have access to the Internet at home but at school only.

### **Opportunity to learn**

- On average across OECD countries, some 54% of students reported being trained at school on how to recognise whether information is biased.
- Students were asked to click on the link of an e-mail from a well-known mobile operator and fill out a form with their data to win a smartphone. This duplicated a phishing e-mail. Approximately 40% of students on average across OECD countries responded that clicking on the link was somewhat appropriate or very appropriate.
- Education systems with a higher proportion of students who were taught how detect biased information in school and who have digital access at home were more likely to distinguish fact from opinion in the PISA reading assessment, even after accounting for country per capita GDP.

### **Navigating digital environments**

- More than half of the students in B-S-J-Z (China), Hong Kong (China), Korea, Singapore and Chinese Taipei followed instructions in the PISA reading assessment by carefully selecting pages relevant to the tasks, limiting visits to irrelevant pages (strictly focused navigation), and actively navigating both single- and multiple-source items (actively explorative navigation). These navigation behaviours were strongly correlated with knowledge of effective reading strategies and reading performance.
- On average across OECD countries, the index of knowledge of effective reading strategies for assessing the credibility of sources is the most strongly associated with reading performance after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic status. The other two reading strategies (i.e. the indices of student knowledge of reading strategies for understanding and memorising a text and summarising information) are also associated with reading performance.

### **Strategies to tackle inequality and gender gaps**

- Disadvantaged students perceived the PISA reading assessment as more difficult than advantaged students even after accounting for students' reading scores in 70 countries and economies that participated in PISA 2018.
- Boys reported they felt the PISA reading test was easier than girls did even though boys scored 25

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points lower than girls in reading after accounting for students' socio-economic backgrounds.

- Almost two-thirds of the association between gender and reading performance can be accounted for by the difference between boys' and girls' knowledge of effective reading strategies. Almost 30% of the association between socio-economic background and reading performance can be accounted for by the difference between socio-economically advantaged and disadvantaged students' reported self-perception of reading competence.

### **Print reading in a digital world**

- Students who reported reading books more often in paper than digital format perform better in reading and spend more time reading for enjoyment in all participating countries/economies in PISA 2018.
- Compared to students who rarely or never read books, digital-book readers across OECD countries read for enjoyment about 3 hours more a week, print-book readers about 4, and those who balance both formats about 5 hours or more a week after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic background and gender.

### **Teachers' practices**

- Disadvantaged students and boys – who typically have a lower reading performance – perceived less stimulating reading activities from their teachers in the 49 countries/economies participating in PISA 2018.
- Reading fiction and long texts for school more frequently was positively associated with reading performance in most countries/economies after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic profiles.
- The relationship between reading performance and time spent using digital devices for schoolwork was negative in 36 countries and economies after accounting for students' and schools' socio-economic status. However, this relationship was positive in Australia, Denmark, Korea, New Zealand, and the United States.

### **How has Internet use changed between 2012 and 2018?**

In 1997, when the first PISA framework for reading began to be discussed, just 1.7% of the world's population used the Internet. By 2019, the number had grown to a global penetration rate of 53.6%, representing 4.1 billion people. (Source: International Telecommunication Union, 2019).

Since 2012, PISA has been asking students how frequently they use the Internet, both at school and outside of school. On average across all countries and economies that distributed the optional ICT familiarity questionnaire between 2012 and 2015, the time that 15-year-olds reported spending on the Internet increased from 21 to 29 hours per week.

In PISA 2018, the total amount of time spent on the Internet increased to 35 hours per week. In other words, this represents a 66% increase in just 6 years and almost as much time as a typical adult workweek. Of the total time students spent on the Internet per week, around 77% was outside of school in 2018, even though the amount of time spent on the Internet at school has increased from 13% to 23% of total time on the Internet from 2012 to 2018.

Despite the clear trend, there were still substantial differences across countries in student use of the Internet in 2018. In Japan and Korea, for instance, students reported spending 23 and 22 hours per week connected to the Internet – which is 4 and 8 hours more than in 2015 respectively. By contrast, Denmark and Sweden's students reported more than 45 hours per week online – which is 10 and 8 hours more than in 2015.

However, at the same time, students in Denmark and Sweden reported that between 38% and 30%, respectively, of the total time spent on the Internet was at school while in Japan and Korea these percentages were 14% and 15% respectively.

# Record low levels of writing enjoyment among children

**R**esearch from the National Literacy Trust has revealed record low levels of writing enjoyment among children and young people, as 1 in 3 (34.5%) children and young people had reported enjoying writing. The figures, which were down from 39.8% last year, represented the lowest level of writing enjoyment recorded by the charity since the question had first been posed to 9-to-18-year-olds in 2010.

However, many children, especially girls, as 2 in 5 had reported that they still enjoyed writing in their free time, compared to 1 in 4 boys. While a decline in writing enjoyment had been reported across all respondents, boys from disadvantaged backgrounds had experienced a particularly pronounced decrease, as there had been a drop of 9.3 percentage points in the last year.

The survey of 42,502 children and young people in the UK had also recorded the lowest daily writing rate in the last 11 years. Only 1 in 7 (15.2%) children and young people has said they wrote something in their spare time every day, which was down 6.3 percentage points from 2020, when over 1 in 5 (21.5%) respondents had reported writing daily.

The research had also revealed an increase in certain formats that were being written digitally, as more children and young people had been writing song lyrics, diary entries, reviews, stories and poems on screen compared to 2019. Many children had reported writing for social connection, whether that had been text messaging or communicating within games.

A quarter (23%) of children who had reported writing in their free time at least once a month, had said that they had done so because it made them feel happy or more confident and 3 in 10 (30.3%) had said it had helped them to relax. In addition, 50% of the writers did so because it helped them feel creative and they were able to express their ideas, while 1 in 7 (14.3%) said that writing made them feel connected to the world.

## Policy papers relevant to literacy

The following policy papers have been published since the last issue of *Literacy Today*.

### *The Reading Framework: Teaching the Foundations of Literacy*

**Author:** -

**Source:** Department for Education

**Document type:** Policy paper

**Published:** Saturday 10 July, 2021

**Reference:** -

**Geographical coverage:** England

**Details:** Guidance for schools to meet existing expectations for teaching early reading. This guidance is for:

- teachers
- school leaders
- reading and literacy leads
- governing bodies
- ITT providers

This guidance:

- focuses on the early stages of teaching reading and the contribution of talk, stories and systematic synthetic phonics (SSP)
- supports primary school leaders to evaluate their teaching of early reading and best practice for improving early reading, especially in Reception and Year 1, and older pupils who have not yet mastered the foundations of reading
- helps schools to meet existing expectations for teaching early reading, as set out in:
  - the national curriculum programmes of study
  - the statutory framework for the early years foundation stage
  - Ofsted's education inspection framework
- This document has been developed through the contributions of experts from across the literacy sector and school leaders. It is based on the valued experience and knowledge of teachers, reading and language experts, educational organisations, English Hubs council members, and our 34 English Hubs.

Schools considering purchasing a new SSP programme can find more information at choosing a phonics programme. Further support for schools is available through our English Hubs Programme, including information on £5 million additional funding for the purchase of SSP programmes. Schools wanting to find out more about the funding should contact one of the following English Hubs:

- North: Jerry Clay English Hub
- Midlands: Learners First English Hub
- South: New Wave English Hub

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-reading-framework-teaching-the-foundations-of-literacy>

### *The Evolution of Cognitive Skills During Childhood Across the UK*

**Authors:** Luke Sibieta and Joshua Fullard.

**Source:** Education Policy Institute.

**Document type:** Research report.

**Published:** Friday 9 July, 2021.

**Reference:** -

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*(Continued from page 33.)*

**Geographical coverage:** United Kingdom.

**Details:** The study, which draws on the detailed Millennium Cohort Study of children born around 2000 and compares outcomes in reading, vocabulary, language and maths, finds that pupils in Wales perform much closer to those in England than has been previously reported in international PISA results, where Wales trailed England significantly.

Scottish pupils are shown to perform better than other UK nations at a very young age, but this quickly recedes as Scottish pupils get older, with pupils falling behind England in most performance measures, particularly in maths.

Pupils in Northern Ireland lead the way among UK nations in most measures of pupil outcomes, even moving ahead of the region of London, which is often widely revered for its high level of educational attainment. The highly positive outcomes displayed by pupils in Northern Ireland through the EPI study are more positive than seen in other international comparisons.

The four nations of the UK have increasingly taken separate paths on education policy since devolution in 1999 – with England focusing on increasing school autonomy, and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland abolishing league tables and external testing.

Despite this, the study is one of only a few to explore how this divergence may have affected pupil performance over the last two decades.

While policymakers typically turn to the OECD's PISA results to compare pupil performance to their international counterparts, these assessments provide only a snapshot of pupil outcomes at the age of 15, missing how they evolve throughout childhood.

[https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/EPI\\_UK-Comparisons-Cognitive-outcomes-1.pdf](https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/EPI_UK-Comparisons-Cognitive-outcomes-1.pdf)

### ***Early Years Funding***

**Author:** David Foster

**Source:** House of Commons Library

**Document type:** Research briefing note

**Published:** Wednesday 9 June, 2021

**Reference:** CBP 8052

**Geographical coverage:** England.

**Details:** This House of Commons Library Briefing provides a short overview of early years funding in England since 2017-18, including funding provided in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8052/>

### ***Let Them Learn: Further education colleges' support for the unemployed***

**Author:** -

**Source:** Association of Colleges (AoC).

**Document type:** Policy report.

**Published:** Wednesday 9 June, 2021

**Reference:** -

**Geographical coverage:** England.

**Details:** The AoC outlines its preferred policy for further education helping the unemployed, including with basic skills.

<https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/LET%20THEM%20LEARN%20-%20FURTHER%20EDUCATION%20COLLEGES%E2%80%99%20SUPPORT%20FOR%20THE%20UNEMPLOYED.pdf>

*(Continued on page 35.)*

(Continued from page 34.)

**PISA. 21st Century Readers: Developing literacy skills in a digital world**

**Authors:** -

**Source:** OECD

**Document type:** Policy report

**Published:** Tuesday 4 May, 2021

**Reference:** ISBN 978-92-64-32422-0 (print), ISBN 978-92-64-67097-6 (pdf).

**Geographical coverage:** OECD member states/global.

**Description:** This substantial volume of research is taken from the last round of PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment, and looks in detail at how 15-year-old students are developing reading skills to navigate the technology-rich 21st century.

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## Republic of Ireland's High PISA performance

**R**esearch by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has suggested that the Republic of Ireland's "good links with the community, a stable policy environment and greater autonomy for schools", were some of the factors which had contributed to Republic of Ireland pupils having higher reading scores than UK countries.

The NFER pointed out that the Republic of Ireland had a history of high reading scores in PISA, and analysis from the last study in 2018, had shown that although the country had many cultural similarities to the four UK nations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland), 15-year-old pupils in the Republic of Ireland achieved higher scores for reading literacy.

The NFER interviewed policy makers and education experts in the Republic of Ireland to understand of its policies, its history and to find out more about their perceptions on what impacted most on its higher performance in PISA reading. Comparing PISA results and policy history across the country and the four UK nations, the report's findings provide potential lessons that could be applied more widely in the UK.

The report highlighted two major, long-term policy initiatives, Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools and the National Strategy, which policy experts had identified as instrumental in driving reading improvement in the Republic of Ireland and contributing to the historically strong levels of basic literacy over many years.

The researchers concluded that the integrated and complementary policies had provided a wide range of interventions to address learning for disadvantaged pupils that had impacted positively on reading and literacy. The policies had also encompassed a wider set of structural changes in the way that teachers were trained and supported, from changes to teacher training and Continuing Professional Development, to the availability of services linking schools and their communities.

Policy experts in the Republic of Ireland had cited a number of significant factors which had led to the successful implementation of the policies. The policies had been designed to integrate, build upon and widen access to the many previous policies that had targeted disadvantaged pupils. By "staying the course" with policies that had worked and provided continuity, the policies had become embedded in communities. Policies had been carefully developed through dialogue with stakeholders and the focus had placed trust in schools to select the appropriate supports and interventions that made the most sense for their pupils, rather than a "one size fits all" approach.

The report pointed out that policies had also focused on outreach to the local community and engaging with families with the goal of sharing, supporting and embedding good learning practices at home. Engaging with families and the local community, had further strengthened an already strong culture that valued reading and education more widely, which had resulted in "strong thread of shared understanding" that ran from policymaking, through schools and stakeholders, and into families and the local community.

Neal Hepworth, Research Manager, Centre for Assessment at NFER, said that building upon previous successful policy, creating links with the community and providing schools with greater autonomy and input in policy creation were successes which the education community could learn from. But he added that there were wider factors which had contributed to the Republic of Ireland's PISA performance and the factors, particularly the reform of teacher training, warranted further exploration.

***"Policy experts in the Republic of Ireland had cited a number of significant factors which had led to the successful implementation of the policies. The policies had been designed to integrate, build upon and widen access to the many previous policies that had targeted disadvantaged pupils. By "staying the course" ... the policies had become embedded in communities."***

## Early years education funding

**W**era Hobhouse (LDP, Bath) introduced a debate on early years education funding. She said that throughout the pandemic, early years providers had said that they had felt to be an afterthought. Ms Hobhouse said that while early years leaders had been working hard to ensure that they could provide high-quality care and education, they needed support from the Government, and therefore their message to the minister was, “Acknowledge the value of early years education and pay what it costs to deliver it.”

She cited a recently published report by the National Day Nurseries Association, which had revealed that nursery closures had increased by 35% in the past financial year, which had affected more than 11,000 children’s places, and the highest number of closures had been in the most deprived communities. Ms Hobhouse urged the Government to look at levelling up the long-term funding stream for education for the more deprived communities in the country, as an urgent priority. But she argued that the shortfall in early years funding had existed long before the pandemic, and COVID-19 had simply widened the gap between the funding and what it cost to deliver. Ms Hobhouse pointed out that most providers had said realistically, they needed more than £6 an hour per child just to break even, let alone to reinvest in their business, and the funding rates simply did not match that. She added that according to YMCA research, 80% of childcare settings could not deliver childcare at the funding rate provided by their local authority.

The chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for childcare and early education, Steve Brine (Con, Winchester), said that the group represented the private, voluntary and independent nurseries that made up the vast majority of the early years sector. He added that he was also a member of the all-party parliamentary group on nursery schools, nursery and reception classes, he knew that maintained nurseries, which were often overlooked in such debates, were also important. Mr Brine said that while the minister would highlight that the Government had introduced a significant package for parents and early years educators, there were still significant funding shortfalls. He pointed out that the Early Years Alliance data had showed a gap of £2.60 per child per hour for every 30-hours place, which was just under £3,000 per child per year.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Keegan (Con, Chichester) said that the Government would be varying its approach to funding the early years sector over the financial year to give local authorities and providers more certainty about their funding income. She pointed out that, for the spring term 2021, the Government had provided top-up funding for authorities that could demonstrate rising demand for free early education entitlements. The minister pointed out that, for the next three terms, each authority would be funded based on attendance data that was provided each term, to ensure that funding would align with attendance, which should provide reassurance for providers that funding for the entitlements would be commensurate with up-to-date data.

Ms Keegan said that in June, the Government had announced £153 million of funding for training for early years staff to support the youngest children’s learning and development, as part of a wider recovery package. She added that, in response to the pandemic, the Government had announced £27 million to support children’s early language development, £17 million of which would deliver the Nuffield early language intervention, or NELI.

The minister said that £10 million would support language development for pre-reception children in the next academic year, and children in reception year would also benefit from the Government’s £650 million catch-up premium for schools, which would ensure that they were supported to make up for any lost teaching time. She said that since June 2020, the Government had neither seen or heard of a significant number of parents being unable to access the childcare they needed. Ms Keegan added that in fact, the number of places available to parents seeking childcare had remained broadly stable since August 2015, and the majority of eligible two, three and four-year-olds had continued to access free childcare, despite the challenges of the pandemic. Gillian Keegan said that the most important thing would be to make sure that local authorities and parents could access childcare, and that there were sufficient places in the system.

# Early Years Foundation Stage

**L**abour's education spokesman in the Lords, Lord Watson of Invergowrie (Lab, Life), moved a motion of regret that the Early Years Foundation Stage (Miscellaneous Amendments) and Childcare Fees (Amendment) Regulations 2021 should not be passed. It introduces the Reception Baseline Assessment that takes effect in September 2021, when the workload of teachers will be significant, schools will be focused on re-opening, and special attention will need to be paid to those children who were unable to develop their language skills because of social isolation during the pandemic; and calls on Her Majesty's Government to provide schools with the flexibility to defer implementation of the Reception Baseline Assessment for the cohort of children starting Reception this year until January 2022. (House of Lords, Motion to Regret a statutory instrument, 14 July 2021.)

Lord Watson based the wording of his regret motion on the Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee's report, "which very clearly set out the concerns felt by committee members after they had considered these regulations and their effect." Labour was not anti-assessment. "Assessment in schools is integral to measuring a child's progress, which at this time is more important than ever. However, the reception baseline assessment that is the subject of these regulations does not assess, nor is it intended to, the progress of children—at least, not within a timeframe that would enable any improvements to be made. It is not a diagnostic assessment; it is designed as a data-collection exercise, with the data collected used to measure the progress of a child from reception to the end of key stage 2." He claimed that the purpose of the baseline assessment was "to produce a score by which the Government claim it will be possible to measure the quality of education. That ignores the views of experts such as the British Educational Research Association, which has said it is not possible to test four year-olds and get reliable data."

Lord Addington (LDP, EH) said he could not see why they are approving these regulations at all. "Unless we are going to use the information more quickly than after seven years, or whatever the period is, it will not make much difference to the pupils. Anything that does not make any difference for them but takes up teaching time is counterproductive."

The former education junior minister Lord Knight of Weymouth (Lab, Life), who is chairman-elect of E-ACT academy group which has a number of primary schools, said he could see the temptation for Ministers to put a baseline at the beginning of primary in order to be able to measure the success of primary schools. He admitted that the Labour Government that he was a member of had a go at this, and it was withdrawn. He recalled a relatively recent pilot study, which was also withdrawn. "In the end it is always withdrawn because it does not really work," he said.

Baroness D'Souza (CB, Life), a former Lord Speaker, said that once again the issue of monitoring and evaluation was being raised, this time to measure a child's progress throughout his or her primary school years. "But," she said, "as we know, there are flaws in all measuring systems, and in the reception baseline assessment more than most. It is based on the mistaken and unproven assumption that all four to five year-olds can be tested as a reasonably uniform group."

Baroness Blower (Lab, Life), the former general secretary of the National Union of Teachers who started her career teaching in a primary school, quoted a teacher who engaged in an earlier iteration of this process and who described baseline assessment as "unreliable, unethical, immoral and expensive, and that it should go once and for all." She then quoted a report from the British Educational Research Association (BERA) which concluded that any results would have "little predictive power and dubious validity".

The Liberal Democrat front bench spokesman in the Lords on education, Lord Storey (LDP, Life), himself a former teacher although at secondary schools, said that it was important to assess four and five year-old children in their first few months in school. "Children start school in different ways. Some are excited and eager to start to play and learn. Some are shy and nervous at this big change to their lives, and some are very frightened at this big step."

The debate was wound up by Baroness Berridge, the Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Department for Education. She said that the reforms to the early years foundation stage that form part of this statutory instrument had been several years in the making. "The aim is to strengthen the early years curriculum, assessment and practice to improve outcomes for all children and to close the disadvantage gap," she said. The Motion of Regret was lost by 216 votes to 232.



# English language teaching

**D**uring oral questions to the Department for International Trade, Caroline Ansell (Con, Eastbourne) asked what discussions had taken place with Cabinet colleagues on supporting the recovery of the UK's English language teaching sector. (House of Commons, oral questions to the Department for International Trade, 10 June 2021 .)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade, Graham Stuart (Con, Beverly and Holderness) said that he, and his co-chairman of the education sector advisory group, the Minister for Universities, continued to engage with colleagues across Government to explore options for further support.

Caroline Ansell asked Mr Stuart to meet her, a delegation of MPs and officials from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to work together to overcome the challenges that the English Language Teaching sector faced and safeguard the future of the vital export. Graham Stuart agreed to the meeting.

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## Prison leavers

**O**ral questions to the Department for Work and Pensions covered prison leavers and their support into employment. (House of Commons, oral questions, Department for Work and Pensions, 17 May 2021.) Miriam Cates (Con, Penistone and Stocksbridge) asked the Secretary of State what her Department was doing to support prison leavers into employment.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Thérèse Coffey (Con, Suffolk Coastal) said that in support of the Prime Minister's crime and justice taskforce, her Department was funding an additional 30 prison work coaches, which would bring the total up to 200, to go into prisons after COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted to help with gaining employment and accessing benefits promptly.

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## Adult skills and lifelong learning

**R**obert Halfon (Con, Harlow), chairman of the Select Committee on Education, introduced a debate on the Third Report of the Education Committee, *A Plan for an Adult Skills and Lifelong Learning Revolution*, HC 278. He said that, despite the recent increases in funding, the welcome further education White Paper, the kickstart fund and other programmes, participation in adult skills and lifelong learning was at its lowest level in 23 years.

He pointed out that 38% of adults had not participated in any learning since leaving full-time education, and participation rates in adult education had almost halved since 2004. Mr Halfon argued that lifelong learning was an affluent person's game; as those who would benefit most from adult learning and training, low-skilled adults in low-income work or the unemployed, were by far the least likely to be doing it. He added that 49% of adults from the lowest socioeconomic group had received no training since leaving school.

Mr Halfon said that in 2016, 92% of adults with a degree-level qualification had undertaken adult learning, compared with 53% of adults with no qualifications. He argued that poor access to lifelong learning was "one of the great social injustices of our time". He warned that low basic skills remained a significant problem, and the fifth largest economy in the world had nine million working-age adults with poor literacy or numeracy skills, or both. Nine million adults also lacked the basic digital skills that were essential for getting on in modern life, and six million adults did not even have a qualification at level two, which was equivalent to GCSE. He added that in the past 10 years, just 17% of low-paid workers had permanently moved out of low pay.

*(Continued on page 40.)*

*(Continued from page 39.)*

Even before COVID-19, the nation had faced significant skills gaps, and by 2024, there would be a shortfall of four million highly skilled workers, and further education colleges would be central to the skills-led recovery. Mr Halfon stressed that support for colleges was particularly important now, as the Association of Colleges report had found that three quarters of college students were between one and four months behind where they would normally be expected to be at the current stage of the academic year.

He pointed out that 40 or 50 years ago, Britain had boasted an adult education system that had been world-leading, and despite well-intentioned reforms over recent years, adult education policy making had too often suffered from “initiative-itis”, which had lurched from one policy priority to the next. But Mr Halfon argued that the system could be rebuilt by pursuing an ambitious long-term strategy for adult skills and lifelong learning. He explained that the strategy, which had four pillars, would start with the funding of an adult community learning centre in every town. Mr Halfon pointed out that 92% of community learning centres had been rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, and they were an important bridge for people, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, to begin the first stage of education. He added that organisations such as the Workers’ Educational Association, and HOLEX members, brought learning to disadvantaged communities, and 38% of Workers’ Educational Association learners were from disadvantaged postcodes, 44% were on income-related benefits, and 41% had no or very low previous qualifications.

Mick Whitley (Lab, Birkenhead) said that while there had been around 40 Green Papers on adult education policy, participation in adult learning was at its lowest level in 24 years, and in 2021, it was easier for a young person to get an offer from Cambridge than it was to get an apprenticeship at Rolls-Royce. He argued that the Department for Education’s recent White Paper on further education had fallen short of the further education revolution that had been promised.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Keegan (Con, Chichester) said that for those aged 16 to 24, facing barriers to entering work or an apprenticeship, the Government was increasing the number of traineeships to give more personalised training, including in English and maths and work experience to help people progress. She added that an additional £126 million would be invested in traineeships in the 2021-22 academic year. The minister explained that traineeships and pre-apprenticeships provided work-based learning focused on improving a young person’s abilities, including how to look and apply for a job, how to prepare and how to be successful in the workplace. She said that they allowed a young person to achieve the level 1 or 2 qualifications that they may have missed out on, and digital skills were included, if a person had not done well in the subjects at school. Ms Keegan added that there was also a vocational and occupational element of learning and, if required, qualifications aligned to a sectoral occupation.

She pointed out that sector-based work academies helped to ensure a sector-based offer for employability training, work experience, that lasted up to six weeks. The minister added that essential digital skills had been updated and they had been available from August 2020. Turning to community learning, Ms Keegan said that there were 259 providers in multiple centres across the country, and her Department had been working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to make sure that more unemployed people could take advantage of the lifetime skills guarantee.

An extension was being piloted to the length of time that a person could receive universal credit while doing work-focused study from later in the month, which would mean that universal credit claimants would be able to train full time for up to 12 weeks, or 16 weeks if they were on a full-time skills bootcamp in England, while receiving universal credit to support their living costs. The minister claimed that the national skills fund had the potential to deliver opportunities to generations of adults who previously had been left behind, and she added that the Government would invest £2.5 billion—£3 billion including Barnett funding for the devolved Administrations. The second part of the lifetime skills guarantee was bootcamps, which had started in the West Midlands, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, and Liverpool City Region, but the many companies involved were aiming to spread them across the country. She argued that the White Paper had been a huge opportunity for apprentices and apprenticeships.

Winding up the debate, Robert Halfon said that his campaigning committee would not put its report on the shelf, and as community learning involved skills, tax credits, and lifelong learning for adults, there would be a good chance to transform the landscape in the country.

# English language sector

**C**onor Burns (Con, Bournemouth West) introduced a debate on the future of the English language sector. (House of Commons, adjournment debate, 15 April 2021.) He pointed out that, like many other sectors, those in the sector had been profoundly affected by the implications of the COVID-19 crisis, and it would need financial support to survive and be in a position to reopen when normal commercial travel resumed and students came back the United Kingdom to study.

Mr Burns thought that guidance issued by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy in February 2021 had said that: “Schools and education providers, including English language schools, tutoring services, private and state schools, are not mandated to close in the regulations and are therefore not eligible to receive a grant under these schemes.” He argued that while the schools were not mandated, because of the number of other very difficult decisions that the Government had rightly had to take to protect the safety of our population, language schools had been forced to close because their customers had not been able to travel to the UK to enrol on the courses and their business had been dramatically impacted.

Mr Burns said that he understood why the Department had said that the schools were not eligible for the restart grants as the funding was for the businesses in the non-essential retail, hospitality, leisure, personal care and accommodation sectors, and because they were not mandated to close, they were therefore not eligible for support from the mandatory grants scheme, but he argued that they were eligible for support through the discretionary funding available to local authorities. He stressed that business rates were the largest single fixed non-controllable costs that businesses faced and it would make the difference between survival or going under.

Mr Burns claimed that the English language sector was worth about £1.4 billion in value added, 35,000 people were employed by the sector, and it was part of the wider £20 billion international education sector. He said that 91% of the employees in the sector had been either furloughed or sacked, and student numbers were down by 79% on 2019. Mr Burns pointed out that the hopes of a longed-for summer recovery had been hit badly by the outbreak of and renewed rise in cases in some of the main countries that the sector attracted students from. But he added that only 17 local authorities across the UK were providing business rate relief to the schools.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Paul Scully (Con, Sutton and Cheam) acknowledged that a number of business sectors, including English language schools, had been severely affected by the Government’s COVID-19 restrictions, even though they had not been required to close. He added that as some home-based businesses and businesses outside the business rates system had found themselves in the same position, the Government had made substantial grant support available for local authorities to develop local discretionary schemes, through the additional restrictions grant.

The minister pointed out that under the scheme, more than £2 billion had been allocated to local authorities since November 2020, and local authorities had the discretion to use the funding to support businesses as they saw fit. He explained that the scheme was open to all businesses from all sectors that had been severely impacted by restrictions, including English language schools. Mr Scully said that the Chancellor had given an extra £425 million in additional restrictions grant money to local authorities, but only if they had used up their original allocation. He called on local authorities to use the extra allocation either to give more money to the businesses covered by their local policies or, to look into expanding their local policies to encompass businesses that continued to fall between the cracks.

The minister urged the sector to also make use of the remainder of the Government business support offer, including the job support scheme, which the Chancellor had confirmed would run until June 2021, and the various loan and finance-guarantee schemes that had been available throughout the pandemic. He also encouraged the sector and the relevant local authorities to explore whether English language schools were eligible for a COVID-19 business grant from the additional restriction grant scheme, at their local authority’s discretion. Mr Scully added that the Budget announcement had also included confirmation of the continuation of several business-support measures to provide a platform as the economy reopened.

The following written questions were answered in Parliament, from the time of the last issue of *Literacy Today* to the present. The period covered is from after the Easter recess in April to just before the summer recess in July 2021.

## House of Commons

### Department for Education

#### Reading

**Afzal Khan:** [27301] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the annual Summer Reading Challenge run by The Reading Agency in maintaining standards in reading; and what assessment his department has made of the potential merits of providing financial support to local authorities to enable them to increase the reach and effect of the Summer Reading Challenge in deprived communities.

**Nick Gibb:** The Department welcomes the Summer Reading Challenge and is supportive of the work of The Reading Agency. The Government is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards, ensuring all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can read fluently and with understanding. In 2018, the Department launched a £26.3 million English Hubs Programme dedicated to improving the teaching of reading. This focuses on supporting children making the slowest progress in reading, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The 34 English Hubs in the programme are primary schools which are outstanding at teaching early reading. The Department has since invested a further £17 million in this school-to-school improvement programme, which focuses on systematic synthetic phonics, early language, and reading for pleasure. In the 2020/21 academic year, the programme is providing intensive support to over 875 partner schools.

*Tuesday 13 July 2021*

#### National Curriculum Tests

**Ed Davey:** [21139] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the More Than A Score report, Drop the SATs for Good, published in 2021, whether he plans to implement any of the recommendations of that report.

**Nick Gibb:** Assessment is a crucial part of a child's schooling and fundamental in a high performing education system. Statutory assessments at primary school are an essential part of ensuring that all pupils master the basics of reading, writing and Mathematics to prepare them for secondary school. Assessment data also enables parents, schools, and the Department to understand the impact of lost time in education and recovery initiatives.

As such, the Department has no plans to cancel the statutory implementation of the Reception Baseline Assessment in September 2021, and the Department continues to plan for a return to a full programme of primary assessments in the 2021/22 academic year. In 2017, the Government carried out a consultation into primary assessment in England. The consultation received over 4,000 responses from a diverse range of backgrounds and specialisms, providing a broad and informed range of views that informed

policy on the current primary assessment system. In addition, the Department engages with relevant stakeholders on a regular basis to understand their views on primary assessment.

*Monday 28 June 2021*

### English Language: GCSE

**Emma Hardy:** [22010] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the adequacy of arrangements for assessing spoken language as part of GCSE English Language; and whether he has had discussions with representatives of Ofqual on that matter.

**Nick Gibb:** There are no current plans to review the subject content for GCSE English Language on which the assessment objectives are based. The Department is supportive of the promotion of oracy, but it has not yet discussed with Ofqual the recommendations made by the Oracy All-Party Parliamentary Group. For 2021 and 2022 assessment only, Ofqual have removed the requirement for teachers to submit an audio-visual recording of a sample of students undertaking their spoken language assessment for GCSE English Language. This offers teachers greater flexibility over how and when the assessments are carried out, allowing them to take account of current and potential public health restrictions.

*Tuesday 29 June 2021*

### School Libraries

**Stuart Anderson:** [22023] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to help schools (a) set up and (b) grow onsite libraries.

**Nick Gibb:** The Department believes that all pupils deserve to be taught a knowledge-rich curriculum that promotes the extensive reading of books and other kinds of texts, both in and out of school. School libraries complement public libraries in allowing pupils to do this. It is for individual schools to decide how best to provide and maintain a library service for their pupils, including whether to employ a qualified librarian.

Many head teachers recognise the important role school libraries play in improving literacy and encouraging pupils to read for pleasure and ensure that suitable library facilities are provided. These may take different forms and could be a book corner in a school classroom, rather than a separate space. The Department is also committing £1.8 billion this financial year in capital funding to help maintain and improve the condition of school buildings, including primary school libraries. Local authorities, academy trusts, and other responsible bodies are best placed to prioritise capital allocations according to local need, including on library facilities where that is the priority.

*Friday 2 July 2021*

### Remote Education: Literacy

**Mark Hendrick:** [12949] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment his Department has made of the potential effect of home schooling and social distancing during the COVID-19 outbreak on children's language skills.

**Nick Gibb:** The Government recognises that extended school and college restrictions have had a substantial



impact on children and young people's education. On 4 June updated findings based on assessments taken in the autumn and spring terms were published. These show that primary pupils were, on average, behind expectations on their return to the classroom in the spring, by a similar amount as they were in September 2020. For reading, this is around 2 months behind.

The Government believes that spoken language underpins the development of reading and writing. The quality and variety of language that pupils hear and speak is vital for developing their vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing. Attaining proficient standards in language development and the reading and writing of standard English are key to unlocking the rest of the curriculum. They are also key indicators for future success in further education, higher education, and employment. Research findings from the Social Distancing and Development Study show that babies and toddlers from disadvantaged backgrounds have been missing out on activities to support their development. Programmes to support language development include:

- £153 million for training for early years staff to support the youngest children's learning and development, which includes speech and language skills.
- An investment of £17 million to provide Nuffield Early Language Intervention, improving the language skills of Reception age children.
- £10 million for a pre-Reception early language continued professional development programme, supporting early years staff to work with disadvantaged children who are at risk of falling behind.
- £5.3 million grant funding to existing early years voluntary and community sector partners to support children's early literacy and language development, including support for children in early years with special educational needs and disabilities, and the wellbeing of disadvantaged children in the early years.

The Department launched a £26.3 million English Hubs programme in 2018, dedicated to improving the teaching of reading. The 34 English Hubs in the programme are primary schools which are excellent at teaching early reading. The Department has since provided a further £17 million for this school-to-school improvement programme, which focuses on systematic synthetic phonics, early language, and reading for pleasure. Since its launch, the English Hubs programme has provided appropriate and targeted support to several thousands of schools across England. Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, English Hubs have continued to offer support and training to schools across the country by bringing much of their offer online. This has involved opening up virtual training and professional development events to a wider pool of schools and distributing materials targeted specifically at remote education and recovery.

*Monday 21 June 2021*

### **Primary Education: Literacy**

**Stuart Anderson:** [11671] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to improve literacy rates among primary school-aged children.

**Nick Gibb:** The Government continues to drive improvements in literacy levels by ensuring high quality systematic synthetic phonics teaching in all our schools to give all children the firm foundation on which to progress through school, and to help them develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information.

England achieved its highest ever score in reading in 2016, moving from joint 10th to joint 8th in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) rankings. This improvement is largely attributable to increases in the average performance of lower performing pupils and boys. These are the first international assessment results from the cohort of pupils who benefited from the changes in primary curriculum and assessment introduced since the 2010 election. In 2019, 82% of pupils in Year 1 met the expected standard in the phonics screening check, compared to just 58% when the check was introduced in 2012. For disadvantaged pupils, this has gone from 45% in 2012 to 71% in 2019. Furthermore, 2019 results showed

that by the end of Year 2, 91% of pupils met the expected standard in the phonics screening check. In 2018, the Department launched a £26.3 million English Hubs Programme to improve the teaching of reading. This focuses on supporting children making the slowest progress in reading, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and is providing intensive support to over 875 partner schools. We have since provided a further £17 million in this school-to-school improvement programme, which focusses on systematic synthetic phonics, early language, and reading for pleasure.

Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, the English Hubs programme has continued to offer support and training to schools across the country by bringing much of their offer online. This has involved opening virtual training and professional development events to a wider pool of schools and distributing materials targeted specifically at remote education and recovery. The English Hubs have adapted to providing intensive support remotely and have delivered more than 1,400 days of specialist phonics training to over 875 partner schools this academic year.

*Tuesday 15 June 2021*

### **Pupils: English Language**

**Emma Hardy:** [7926] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect of COVID-19 school closures on the spoken language (a) development and (b) ability of schoolchildren across all ages.

**Nick Gibb:** The Government recognises that extended school and college restrictions have had a substantial impact on children and young people's education and we are working with schools and colleges to develop a long-term plan to support pupils make up for education lost over the course of this Parliament.

In June 2021, the Department announced £1.4 billion of additional funding for education recovery. This is in addition to the £1.7 billion already committed, bringing total investment announced for education recovery over the past year to over £3 billion. The additional funding package provides support for children aged 2 to 19 in schools, colleges and early years settings, and will increase reforms in two areas where the evidence is clear our investment will have a significant impact: high quality tutoring and teaching. This will provide an additional £1 billion for tutoring, which will allow us to provide up to 100 million hours of tuition for 5-19-year-olds by 2024, targeting disadvantaged children and key subjects such as maths and English.

We are also making available an extra £400 million to help to provide 500,000 teacher training opportunities across the country, alongside professional development for early years practitioners. The Department launched a £26.3 million English Hubs programme in 2018, dedicated to improving the teaching of reading. The 34 English Hubs in the programme are primary schools which are outstanding at teaching early reading. We have since provided a further £17 million for this school-to-school improvement programme, which focuses on systematic synthetic phonics, early language, and reading for pleasure.

Since its launch, the English Hubs programme has provided appropriate and targeted support to several thousands of schools across England. In the 2020/21 academic year the programme is providing intensive support to over 875 partner schools.

**Emma Hardy:** [7927] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking tackle the language gap between the most and least advantaged pupils.

**Nick Gibb:** The Department recognises that extended school and college restrictions have had a substantial impact on children and young people's education and are committed to helping pupils make up education lost due to the COVID-19 outbreak. To address this challenge, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, is committed to working with parents, teachers, and schools and colleges to develop a long-term plan to help schools and colleges to support pupils make up their lost education over the course of this Parliament. There is sound evidence that systematic phonics is a highly effective method for teaching early reading. The evidence indicates that the teaching of phonics is most effective when combined with a language-rich

curriculum. Evidence has also shown that phonics is an important component in the development of early reading skills, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Our phonics performance has improved since the tests were introduced. In 2019, 82% of pupils in Year 1 met the expected standard in the phonics screening check, compared to just 58% when the check was introduced in 2012. For disadvantaged pupils, this has gone from 45% in 2012 to 71% in 2019. 2019 results showed that by the end of Year 2, 91% of pupils met the expected standard in the phonics screening check.

In June 2021, the Department announced £1.4 billion of additional funding for education recovery. This is in addition to the £1.7 billion already committed, bringing total investment announced for education recovery over the past year to over £3 billion. The additional funding package provides support for children aged 2 to 19 in schools, colleges and early years settings, and will increase reforms in two areas where the evidence is clear our investment will have a significant impact: high quality tutoring and teaching. This will provide an additional £1 billion for tutoring, which will allow us to provide up to 100 million hours of tuition for 5-19-year-olds by 2024, targeting disadvantaged children and key subjects such as maths and English. The National Curriculum has been designed to make sure that all children leave primary school fully literate and ready to progress at secondary school.

One of the overarching aims of the National Curriculum is to ensure that all pupils acquire a wide vocabulary, an understanding of grammar and knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading, writing and spoken language. The curriculum for English increases the level of demand from an early age with greater emphasis on grammar and vocabulary development.

The Department also launched a £26.3 million English Hubs Programme in 2018, dedicated to improving the teaching of reading, with a focus on supporting children making the slowest progress in reading, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

*Wednesday 9 June 2021*

### Literacy recovery strategy

**Christian Wakeford:** [568] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will take steps to ensure that businesses are included in his Department's plans for a literacy recovery strategy.

**Nick Gibb:** The Department recognises that extended school and college restrictions have had a substantial impact on children and young people's education. We are committed to helping pupils make up education lost due to the COVID-19 outbreak. To address this challenge, my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, committed to working with parents, teachers, schools and colleges to develop a long-term plan to help schools and colleges support pupils to make up their education over the course of this Parliament.

In addition, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, has appointed Sir Kevan Collins as Education Recovery Commissioner to advise on the development of the long-term recovery plan. Sir Kevan will engage with parents, pupils, and teachers in advising on the development of this plan and review how evidence-based interventions can be used to address the impact the COVID-19 outbreak has had on education. Further details will be shared in due course. On literacy specifically, the Government is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards, ensuring all children, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, can read fluently and with understanding.

The Government will continue to work closely with a wide range of organisations, including businesses, to achieve this aim, and values the contribution of businesses to supporting children's education. For example, in June 2020 we announced a £1 billion catch-up package, including a National Tutoring Programme and a catch-up premium for this academic year. In February 2021, we committed to further funding of £700 million to fund summer schools, the expansion of our tutoring programmes, and a recovery premium for the next academic year. Funding will support pupils across nurseries, schools, and 16-19 colleges.

*Wednesday 19 May 2021*

## Children: Literacy

**Gill Furniss:** [180573] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to improve literacy levels among primary school children.

**Nick Gibb:** The Government is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards, including for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds. English is fundamental to education and provides the knowledge pupils need to communicate with others, both in school and in the wider world, providing pupils the opportunity to develop their spoken language, reading and writing. The National Curriculum has been designed to make sure that all children leave primary school fully literate and ready to progress at secondary school.

There is a renewed focus on the requirement for pupils to be taught to read through systematic synthetic phonics and applying phonic knowledge to word reading. By ensuring high quality phonics teaching, the Government wants to improve literacy levels to give all children a solid base upon which to build as they progress through school and help children to develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information. The curriculum places a greater focus on reading and requires pupils to study a range of books, poems and plays to encourage the development of a lifelong love of literature.

Within the framework of the National Curriculum, schools make their own choices on the specific programmes or resources they use. The curriculum for English increases the level of challenge from an early age with greater emphasis on grammar and vocabulary development, and in 2013 the Department introduced a new test of pupils' knowledge in this area to be taken by Year 6 pupils. Ofsted's inspection framework now puts much more focus on how well schools are teaching their pupils to read, with inspectors listening to children reading aloud, watching phonics classes, and checking how schools help weaker readers to improve. The Ofsted inspection framework is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/education-inspection-framework>.

England achieved its highest ever score in reading in 2016, moving from joint 10th to joint 8th in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study rankings. This improvement is largely attributable to increases in the average performance of lower performing pupils. This follows a greater focus on reading in the primary curriculum, and a particular focus on phonics. In 2018, the Department launched a £26.3 million English Hubs Programme dedicated to improving the teaching of reading, with a focus on supporting children making the slowest progress in reading, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The 34 English Hubs in the programme are primary schools which are outstanding at teaching early reading. The Department has since invested a further £17 million in this school-to-school improvement programme, which focusses on systematic synthetic phonics, early language, and reading for pleasure. Since its launch, the English Hubs Programme has provided appropriate and targeted support to several thousands of schools across England. In the 2020/21 academic year the programme is providing intensive support to over 875 partner schools. The proportion of Year 1 pupils meeting the expected standard in the phonics screening check has gone from 58% in 2012, when the check was introduced, to 82% in 2019. For disadvantaged pupils, this has gone from 45% to 71%.

*Tuesday 27 April 2021*

## Children: Literacy

**Imran Ahmad Khan:** [176098] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent steps his Department has taken to increase literacy rates for children from low-income households.

**Nick Gibb:** The Government is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards, ensuring all children can read fluently and with understanding. The first five years of a child's life provide a critical opportunity to close development gaps between disadvantaged children and their peers, particularly in Reception year. Through the Early Years Professional Development Programme, the Department is investing £20 million to



provide practitioners in pre-Reception settings with access to high-quality training to raise practitioners' skills in supporting young children's development in early language, literacy and mathematics. Improving these skills will drive up quality in the pre-school years, so that more children arrive at Reception year with the foundations in place to make the most of primary school. We have also invested £9 million of National Tutoring Programme funding in improving the language skills of Reception age children who need it most this academic year, through the Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI).

In 2018, we launched a £26.3 million English Hubs Programme dedicated to improving the teaching of reading, with a focus on supporting children making the slowest progress in reading, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds. The 34 English Hubs in the programme are primary schools which are outstanding at teaching early reading. We have since invested a further £17 million in this school-to-school improvement programme, which focuses on systematic synthetic phonics, early language, and reading for pleasure. Since its launch, the English Hubs Programme has provided appropriate and targeted support to several thousands of schools across England. In this academic year, the programme is providing intensive support to over 875 partner schools.

Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak, English Hubs have continued to offer support and training to schools across the country by bringing much of their offer online. This has involved opening up virtual training and professional development events to a wider pool of schools and distributing materials targeted specifically at remote education and recovery. English Hubs have adapted well to providing intensive support remotely and have delivered more than 1,400 days of specialist phonics training to over 875 partner schools so far, this academic year.

Furthermore, we have worked closely with our English Hubs Programme to support them in guiding their networks of schools through the challenges of school disruption, particularly in promoting the importance of reading among head teachers. As part of recognising the importance of reading during the disruption to education caused by COVID-19, the Department held a Reading Together Day on 16 July 2020 to celebrate the benefits of reading: <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/media/reading-together-day-announced-for-16-july-2020.html>.

As part of this, we have published 10 top tips to help parents support their children to read: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-top-tips-to-encourage-children-to-read>.

Additionally, the £1 billion catch up package announced in June 2020 included a new £350 million National Tutoring Programme (NTP) which provides additional, targeted support for those children and young people who have been hardest hit from disruption to their education as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The NTP is an ambitious scheme that will increase access to high-quality tuition for the most disadvantaged children and young people, helping to accelerate their academic progress and tackling the attainment gap. The programme is intended to support disadvantaged pupils eligible for pupil premium funding. We recognise there are different indicators for disadvantage and teachers and head teachers should exercise professional judgement when identifying which pupils would benefit most from this additional support. The NTP for this academic year comprises of three elements:

- A tuition programme for 5-16-year-olds; schools can access tuition support from approved Tuition Partners and the most disadvantaged schools are supported to employ an 'in-house' Academic Mentor to support tuition for their pupils: <https://nationaltutoring.org.uk/>.
- A 16-19 Tuition Fund; we are providing funding to support small group tuition for 16-19-year-olds, in English, mathematics, and other courses where learning has been disrupted as a result of COVID-19: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-16-to-19-tuition-fund>. We are asking colleges to prioritise their disadvantaged students who have not achieved a grade 4 in English and/or mathematics.
- The evidence-based NELI. We have invested £9 million on NELI this academic year to improve the language skills of Reception age children who need it most, providing training and resources free of charge to schools that would particularly benefit. 40% of primary schools signed up for the programme. Priority was given to schools with the highest levels of disadvantage (% pupils eligible for free school meals). In February 2021, we announced plans for the next academic year - a further £8 million for Nuffield Foundation to deliver Reception year early language provision in academic year 2021-2022, enabling the NELI to be offered to many more schools in the next academic year.



Furthermore, to support the hard work of schools in delivering remote education, Oak National Academy was very quickly brought together by over 40 teachers, their schools and other education organisations. The Department has made £4.84 million available for Oak both for the summer term of the academic year 2019-20, and then for the 2020-21 academic year, to provide video lessons in a broad range of subjects, including English, for Reception up to Year 11. Specialist content for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities is also available.

*Monday 19 April 2021*

### English Language: Higher Education

**Christian Matheson:** [174875] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, for each of the last five years for which figures are available, what was the total number of (a) applicants and (b) graduates for English degree courses at universities in England.

**Michelle Donelan:** The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) does not publish data on the number of applicants to each course. However, UCAS does publish data on applications to full-time undergraduate courses at UK higher education (HE) providers in their End of Cycle Data Resources pages. Each applicant can make up to 5 applications. The table below shows the numbers of main scheme applications to undergraduate English studies courses at English HE providers for application cycles 2016 to 2020.

#### Applications 1 to undergraduate English studies courses at English HE providers - application cycles 2016 to 2020

CYCLE YEAR 2	NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS TO ENGLISH STUDIES COURSE (JACS) 3
2016	41,805
2017	39,930
2018	36,245
2019	33,440
2020	29,830

Source: UCAS End of Cycle data resources <https://www.ucas.com/data-andanalysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-sector-level-endcycle-data-resources-2020>.

[1] Does not refer to individual applicants. Each unique applicant can make up to 5 main scheme applications. This does not cover applicants who applied Direct to Clearing or applicants who applied directly to the provider. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5.

[2] Refers to application cycle year. The 2020 cycle covers applicants typically entering higher education in the 2020/2021 academic year.

[3] English studies defined as principal category Q3 of the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS). This code excludes those studying Imaginative Writing (I8). More information on JACS codes can be found here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/jacs>.

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects and publishes statistics on qualifications obtained at UK HE providers. The latest data refers to academic year 2019/20.

The table below shows the numbers of first-degree qualifiers in English studies at English HE providers between academic years 2015/16 and 2019/20. Information for the academic year 2019/20 is provided in a separate column due to the introduction of a new subject classification system, the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH). Figures for the academic year 2019/20 are not directly comparable with previous years, because “Studies of specific authors” and “Creative writing” are now included in the ‘English Studies’ category. Excluding those categories gives a count of 8,110 qualifiers in the academic year 2019/20,

although this is still not directly comparable with earlier years due to the new coding methodology.

#### First-degree qualifiers 4 in English studies courses at English HE providers 5 - academic years 2015/16 to 2019/20

ACADEMIC YEAR	NUMBER OF QUALIFIERS IN ENGLISH	NUMBER OF QUALIFIERS IN STUDIES COURSES (JACS) 6 ENGLISH STUDIES COURSES (CAH) 7
2015/16	10,475	–
2016/17	10,355	–
2017/18	9,665	–
2018/19	9,165	–
2019/20	-	9,405

Source: HESA Student open data pages, <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-andanalysis/students/table-19> and <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-andanalysis/students/table-51>.

[4] Counts are based on full-person-equivalents. Where a student is studying more than one subject, they are apportioned between the subjects that make up their course. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5, in line with HESA rounding conventions: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/definitions/students#rounding-and-suppression-strategy>.

[5] Data between the academic years 2015/16 and 2018/19 excludes a small minority of qualifiers from alternative providers.

[6] English studies is defined as principal category Q3 of the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS). More information on JACS codes can be found here: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/jacs>.

[7] English studies is defined as Common Aggregate Hierarchy level 2 (CAH2), which is the sum of codes “19-01-01 English studies (non-specific)”, “19-01-02 English language”, “19-01-03 Literature in English”, “19-01-04 Studies of specific authors”, “19-01-05 Creative writing” and “19-01-06 Others in English studies”.

More information on CAH codes can be found here:

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah-about>.

*Monday 19 April 2021*

### Primary Education: School Libraries

**Gill Furniss:** [180572] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to improve primary school library facilities.

**Nick Gibb:** The Department believes that all pupils deserve to be taught a knowledge-rich curriculum that promotes the extensive reading of books and other kinds of texts, both in and out of school. School libraries complement public libraries in allowing pupils to do this. It is for individual schools to decide how best to provide and maintain a library service for their pupils, including whether to employ a qualified librarian.

Many head teachers recognise the important role school libraries play in improving literacy and encouraging pupils to read for pleasure and ensure that suitable library facilities are provided.

The National Curriculum requires teachers to encourage pupils to develop the habit of reading widely and often, for both pleasure and information. It also emphasises the importance of listening to, discussing, and reading for themselves a wide range of stories, poems, plays and non-fiction books. The Department is investing £14 billion more in schools over the three financial years to 2022-23, allowing schools to provide more resources like library provision, to make sure all pupils get the top-quality education they deserve.

*Monday 19 April 2021*

# Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

## Public Libraries: Coronavirus

**Navendu Mishra:** [29149] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, with reference to the Answer of 15 October 2020 to Question HL8910 on Public Libraries: Coronavirus, what the outcome was of the joint letter with the Local Government Association to local authorities in England requesting detail of restoration of their library services.

**Caroline Dinenage:** The joint letter was issued on 16 July 2020 and followed physical library buildings being permitted to reopen at that time. The purpose of the letter was to remind local authorities in England of the Secretary of State's statutory duty under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and asked them to share their plans for the restoration of their library service from July 2020 onwards to assist this function. Of the 150 local authorities in England, 149 responded to this request, including a detailed reply from Stockport. Since that time further restrictions and lockdowns were introduced which restricted the services libraries were able to deliver and included physical library locations having to close during the lockdown earlier this year.

DCMS worked closely with library sector stakeholders to identify and achieve important exceptions to restrictions on physical services and although library locations were closed, they were enabled to provide limited specific services including order and collect services or providing access to public PCs for essential services and home library services. Whether services were provided was for each local authority to determine after appropriate risk assessments around safety of both users and people working in libraries.

*Monday 12 July 2021*

## Public Libraries: Internet

**Jim Shannon:** [19586] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what steps he is taking to support public libraries in the context of increasing use of online reading.

**Caroline Dinenage:** Please note that public libraries is a devolved matter. In England, whilst library buildings were closed or access limited during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant rise in the number of people accessing library services online and downloading e-books and e-audiobooks from their library service. Although absolute numbers of online readers increased, this was from a low base and it is not yet clear whether this will be a permanent shift or drop back.

It will be for local councils, as the statutory providers of library services, to consider the needs of local people and communities with regard to future planning for digital library provision. Total support committed to councils in England to tackle the impacts of COVID-19 is over £12 billion. Over £6 billion of this is un-ringfenced in recognition that local authorities are best placed to decide how to meet the COVID-19 pressures in their area, including public libraries.

*Monday 28 June 2021*

## Public Libraries: Digital Technology

**Julie Elliott:** [15249] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the findings of the report entitled Libraries on the front lines of the digital divide published in 2021.

**Caroline Dinenge:** Library services are a statutory responsibility of local government and each library authority determines how best to deliver its services and allocate funding for the benefit of its communities in a manner which is “comprehensive and efficient”. Library services already play a vital role in bridging the digital divide. Libraries Deliver: Ambition, the Government’s strategy for public libraries included improved digital access and literacy as one of the seven outcomes that libraries deliver for their communities. Information and Digital is one of the four Universal Library Offers recognised by the libraries sector, and libraries are flagged in the 2017 UK Digital Strategy. More recently their vital role was recognised through an exemption under the National Restrictions to enable provision of access to public PCs for people to use essential services during lockdown; we are aware that this was highly valued and used.

*Thursday 17 June 2021*

### English Language: Education

**Alan Brown:** [175929] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what assessment he has made of the financial effect of COVID-19 travel restrictions on the operation of English Language Teaching Centres.

**Alan Brown:** [175930] To ask the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, what sectoral support has recently been provided to the operators of English Language Teaching Centres.

**Nigel Huddleston:** We recognise that COVID-19 restrictions are significantly impacting tourism across the country, and that these remain extremely challenging conditions for businesses such as English Language Teaching Centres, which are important to the supply chain. English Language Schools have been, and are, able to benefit from a wide variety of Government support, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, which has been extended until September, a variety of generous Government backed loan schemes and grants through the Additional Restrictions Grant scheme, although this is for England only.

The guidance for the Additional Restrictions Grant funding was updated on 22 March to include the £425m top-up from 1 April 2021. This states that Local Authorities are encouraged to support businesses from all sectors that may have been severely impacted by restrictions, but are not eligible for the Restart Grant scheme. The document states that this may include English Language Schools, alongside a number of other businesses. Although funding issued under the Additional Restrictions Grant scheme is ultimately issued at the discretion of Local Authorities, we encourage and expect them to be sympathetic to applications from English Language Schools, as well as other businesses in the tourism supply chain which have been affected by COVID-19 restrictions.

*Tuesday 13 April 2021*

## Home Office

### English Language: Education

**Stephen Morgan:** [183270] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what recent assessment she has made of the effect of the UK leaving the EU on the ability of UK teachers of English as a Foreign Language to secure work in the EU.

**Kevin Foster:** The Home Office has made no such assessment given the Home Office has no responsibility for outbound mobility.

*Tuesday 27 April 2021*

## Visas: English Language

**Drew Hendry:** [179233] To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what assessment her Department has made of the potential merits of enabling visa applicants who would have to travel between local authority areas to attend a testing centre to undertake online English language testing during the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Kevin Foster:** As of 13 April 2021, all SELT test centres in the United Kingdom are open, and testing is available with appropriate health and safety measures in place. There are currently no plans to introduce online testing. Consideration of the feasibility of online testing prior to the award of the current concessions contracts was undertaken in 2019, however it was assessed at the time the maturity of online proctoring technology and its anti-fraud measures were not at a suitable level to ensure the integrity of the SELT. The Home Office continues to be interested in the opportunities, innovations and new technologies in this space which can be provided to our customers in the future.

*Thursday 15 April 2021*

## Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government

### English Language: Education

**Rachael Maskell:** [8660] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether English language centres are eligible for expanded retail discount.

**Luke Hall:** Local authorities are responsible for administering the expanded retail discount and will be reimbursed for the costs of providing the relief to ratepayers that meet the eligibility criteria, as set out in guidance published by the Department. The guidance states that properties eligible for the expanded retail discount are those that are wholly or mainly used as shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas, and live music venues; those used by members of the public for assembly and leisure; or hotel, guest and boarding premises, and self-catering accommodation. It is for local authorities to decide whether individual English language centres fall within one of these categories.

*Thursday 10 June 2021*

### English Language: Education

**Rachael Maskell:** [1112] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, whether the Government plans to reimburse local authorities that have agreed to extend the Expanded Retail Discount to English Language Colleges in their locality on the basis that those businesses have been unable to open their premises during the COVID-19 lockdown national restrictions.

**Luke Hall:** In response to the pandemic, the Government has provided business rates relief for eligible retail, hospitality, and leisure properties worth £16 billion across 2020/21 and 2021/22. As with other business rates reliefs, local authorities will be fully reimbursed for the costs of providing this relief to ratepayers who meet the eligibility criteria as set out in the guidance published by the Department.

*Tuesday 18 May 2021*



## English Language: Education

**Afzal Khan:** [185472] To ask the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, what support he is providing to the English language teaching sector to mitigate the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Luke Hall:** The Government has made substantial business support available throughout the COVID-19 pandemic including grants, loans, reliefs and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Specifically on grants, although English Language Schools are not eligible for the Government's Restart Grant programme – which is aimed at the non-essential retail, hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym sectors – they may be eligible for support via the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). ARG provides local authorities with funding to put in place discretionary support that suits their local area.

*Thursday 29 April 2021*

## H M Treasury

### English Language: Education

**Clive Lewis:** [10520] To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the Government plans to extend full business rates relief to all English Language Teaching (ELT) schools in (a) 2020-21 and (b) 2021-22.

**Jesse Norman:** The Government has provided enhanced support to the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors through business rates relief given the direct and acute impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on those sectors. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has published guidance on eligibility for the relief, which is targeted at premises that are wholly or mainly being used as shops, restaurants, cafes, drinking establishments, cinemas and live music venues; for assembly and leisure; or as hotels, guest and boarding premises, and self-catering accommodation.

*Friday 11 June 2021*

### English Language: Education

**Afzal Khan:** [185473] To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what support he is providing to the English language teaching sector to mitigate the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Kemi Badenoch:** The Government is making sure that people and businesses have access to the support they need as quickly as possible. The Government has supported businesses through the COVID-19 crisis through an unprecedented support package, including grants for smaller businesses, government-backed loans, and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to protect jobs.

An additional £500 million has been made available via the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG), announced by the Chancellor on 5 January. This builds on the £1.1 billion already allocated following the second lockdown in November 2020. This further grant funding is designed to support businesses that are severely impacted by the new COVID-19 restrictions. Local authorities have discretion to use this funding to support businesses in the way they see fit, and to determine which businesses are eligible. I encourage English Language Schools to make full use of the extensive support available.

*Wednesday 28 April 2021*

# House of Lords

## English Language: Education

**Lord Bourne of Aberystwyth:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what support they are providing to English language tuition businesses in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL1797]

**Lord Callanan:** The Government has introduced an unprecedented package of support for businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including grants, business interruption loans and the Coronavirus Job Support Scheme. English Language Schools were not eligible for the Government's Restart Grant programme, which was aimed at the non-essential retail, hospitality, accommodation, leisure, personal care and gym sectors. However, the sector is eligible for support via the Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG). The ARG provides Local Authorities with funding to put in place discretionary support that suits their local area.

*Monday 19 July 2021*

## English Language: Education

**Lord Gilbert of Panteg:** To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Berridge on 2 June (HL434), whether they still intend to publish a cross-Government English language strategy, as set out in the Integrated Communities Strategy green paper. [HL1599]

**Baroness Berridge:** I refer the noble Lord to the answer I gave on 2 June 2021 to Question HL434. This government remains committed to English language as demonstrated by the manifesto commitment to boost English language teaching. Our response to the COVID-19 outbreak is our priority at present. We will provide an update on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in due course. The department also remains committed to strengthening communities through integration.

Since publication, we have made significant progress on the commitments in the Integrated Communities Action Plan. This includes providing over 18,000 learner places through our Integrated Communities English Language Programme (£4.5 million) and Coordination Fund (£1.2 million), and setting up of five Integration Areas. We continue to build upon the Integration Area Programme and are working hard to boost English language provision, including through the ESOL for Integration Fund.

*Tuesday 20 July 2021*

## Literacy: Teaching Methods

**Lord Watson of Invergowrie:** To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to their decision to administer a phonics screening check to year 2 pupils in the 2021–22 autumn term, what assessment they have made of the effects of such tests on children's mental health and wellbeing. [HL1274]

**Baroness Berridge:** The purpose of the 2021 autumn phonics screening check is to ensure that year 2 pupils who require further support in decoding phonics are identified early and given that support in good time. Schools should support a culture of wellbeing amongst staff and pupils, and while assessment is a fundamental part of a child's education, it is not meant to cause them stress or anxiety.

The department trusts schools to approach the phonics screening check appropriately. Children and young people's mental health and wellbeing is a priority for this government. The department is continuing to help schools support children and young people's wellbeing during the COVID-19 outbreak. More than

£17 million of mental health funding was announced in May 2021 to improve mental health and wellbeing support in schools and colleges.

*Monday 5 July 2021*

### English Language: Education

**Lord Gilbert of Panteg:** To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Integrated Communities Strategy green paper, published on 14 March 2018, when they plan to publish an English language strategy. [HL434]

**Baroness Berridge:** This government remains committed to English language as demonstrated by the manifesto commitment to boost English language teaching. We know that language skills are crucial to help people integrate into life in England, as well as to break down barriers to work and career progression. This is why we want to support all adults in England to secure the English language skills they need. The department funds English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision through the Adult Education Budget (AEB). Currently, approximately 50% of the AEB is devolved to 7 Mayoral Combined Authorities and the Mayor of London, acting where appropriate through the Greater London Authority. These authorities are now responsible for the provision of AEB funded adult education, including ESOL, for their residents and allocation of the AEB to providers. The Education and Skills Funding Agency is responsible for the remaining AEB in non-devolved areas. In 2019/20, 116,100 adult learners were supported through the AEB, across devolved and non-devolved areas to improve their levels of English through fully and part funded ESOL courses. Our response to the COVID-19 outbreak is our priority at present. We will provide an update on ESOL in due course.

*Monday 7 June 2021*

### Literacy: Secondary Education

**Lord Taylor of Warwick:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that secondary schools are equipped to help new pupils with basic literacy. [HL14846]

**Baroness Berridge:** The government is committed to continuing to raise literacy standards, particularly those of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. English is fundamental to education and provides the knowledge and skills pupils need to communicate with others, both in school and in the wider world. English provides opportunities for pupils to develop these key communication skills through work on spoken language, reading and writing. English is a core subject of the National Curriculum and is a requirement from age 5 to 16. The National Curriculum was revised, and programmes of study came into effect from September 2014. The programmes of study are designed to ensure that all pupils acquire a wide vocabulary, a good understanding of grammar, and proper knowledge of linguistic conventions for reading and writing. Further information on the National Curriculum can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nationalcurriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study>.

The English Language GCSE provides all students with robust foundations in reading and good written English, and with the language and literary skills which are required for further study and work. The English Literature GCSE rewards students for engaging with a wider range of literature at a deeper level. To further support English attainment at the end of secondary school, all students aged 16-19 on study programmes of 150 hours or more who do not hold a GCSE grade 4 or above in English are required to continue to study, this is called the Condition of Funding and further information on this can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-mathsand-english-condition-offunding#:~:text=The%20qualifications%20that%20meet>

%20the, and %20'stepping %20stone' %20qualifications. & te  
xt=From %20academic %20year %202019 %20to, GCSE %20 grade %209 %20to %204.

Students with a prior attainment of grade 2 or below can study a level 2 Functional Skills or a GCSE. Those with a grade 3 must study GCSEs only. Achievement in level 2 English is also an exit requirement in T Levels and apprenticeships. To support the work of schools in delivering remote education, Oak National Academy was very quickly brought together by over 40 teachers, their schools and other education organisations. The

Department has made £4.84 million available for Oak National Academy both for the summer term of the academic year 2019/20, and then for the 2020/21 academic year, to provide video lessons in a broad range of subjects, including English for 5- to 16-year-olds. Further details on Oak National Academy can be found here: <https://www.thenational.academy/>.

Furthermore, the £1 billion catch-up funding announced in June 2020 included a new £350 million National Tutoring Programme (NTP) which provides additional, targeted support for those children and young people who have been hardest hit from disruption to their education as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. The NTP is an ambitious scheme that will increase access to high-quality tuition for the most disadvantaged children and young people. NTP provision will continue for another academic year (2021/22) and we expect the programme to continue supporting those pupils that need the most help to catch up. Further details on the NTP can be found here: <https://nationaltutoring.org.uk/>.

In addition, as part of a wider recovery package to support children and young people of all ages in catching up on missed learning and development due to the COVID-19 outbreak, £200 million will be made available to secondary schools to deliver face-to-face summer schools this year. Schools are free to identify the pupils most in need of a summer school, although we recommend a focus on incoming Year 7 pupils. Pupils leaving primary school this year may have missed a significant proportion of Key Stage 2 face-to-face teaching and therefore missed valuable preparation for secondary education. They are likely to need additional support with English, for example, to make it easier for them to access the secondary curriculum. A summer school gives an opportunity to offer that face-to-face support before they start a new school, but also offers an important opportunity to support pupils' wellbeing. Further details on summer schools can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/kick-start-for-summer-school-and-activities>.

Monday 26 April 2021

### English Language: Education

**Baroness Hooper:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they intend to take to support the economic role of UK English Language Schools accredited by the British Council following the reduction in their income during the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL14317]

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:** The Government will continue to support the UK English Language Training (ELT) sector, working closely with English UK - which manages the Accreditation UK quality assurance scheme for UK ELT centres in partnership with the British Council - and others to co-ordinate efforts to boost UK education exports. The Government also continues to support the UK ELT sector more broadly through the global 'Education is GREAT' campaign. The Chancellor confirmed the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) will be extended until 30 September 2021 in the 2021 Budget announced on 3 March 2021. A range of further measures to support all businesses, including those not eligible for the business rates holiday, such as language schools, has also been made available. The FCDO has provided significant support to the British Council to help mitigate the financial impact of the pandemic on their operations.

Monday 12 April 2021

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# LITERACY *Today*

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## Subscription Rates

One year:	£60
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***Literacy Today* is published once a term (three times a year) and is now available only in electronic format. Please supply the email address you wish the magazine to be supplied to when ordering.**

***Literacy Today* No. 96  
July 2021**

**ISSN: 1367-8825**

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Published by  
The Education Publishing Company Ltd., Devon.  
Email: [info@educationpublishing.com](mailto:info@educationpublishing.com)  
Web: [www.educationpublishing.com](http://www.educationpublishing.com)

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***Literacy Today* was originally the magazine of the National Literacy Trust. In 1999 the Education Publishing Company began publishing *Literacy Today* on behalf of the Trust, buying the magazine from the Trust in 2005. It now has no connection with the Trust. Originally published as a print title, from 2012 it has been available only in electronic format.**

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